

THE LONDON READER

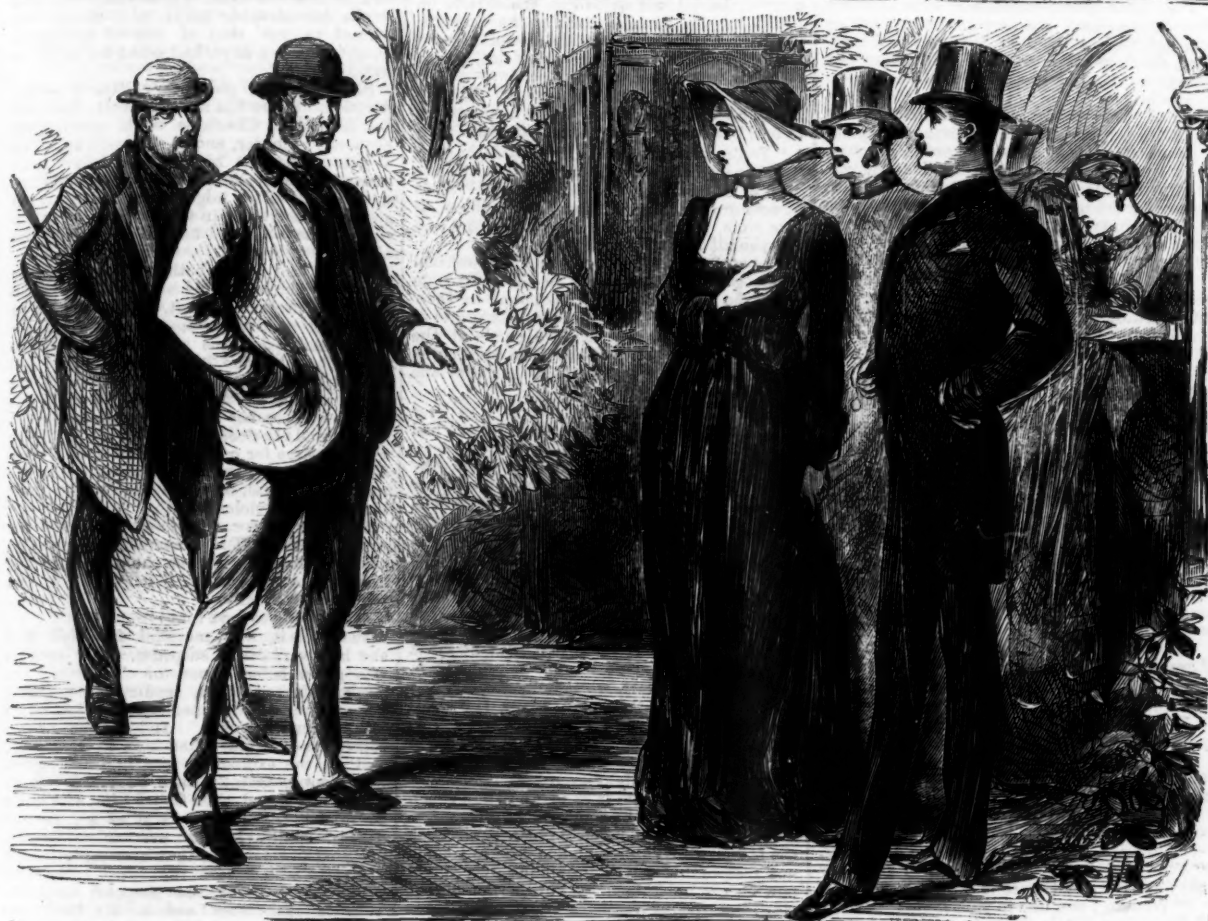
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FOR THE WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 1, 1887.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[ARRESTED FOR MURDER!]

ROYAL'S PROMISE.

CHAPTER V.

THE inhabitants of No. 4, But's Alley, Rosemary-lane, although not apt to feel surprised at anything, could hardly help a little astonishment at the immediate results of Posy's accident, for the first of these was the disappearance of Gentleman Jack and the vacancy of the dingy room on the ground-floor.

Not that "Gentleman Jack" vanished suddenly, leaving his rent unpaid—a not unfrequent occurrence in the alley. He paid up like a man, and gave a week extra, in lieu of notice. He seemed very free with his money people decided; they would have thought so still more could they have seen the very comfortable lodgings to which he presently removed, and inspected the complete outfit which he purchased at a ready-made clothing establishment.

Ten minutes' conversation with Lord Delamere and the gentleman beggar knew that his

fortune was made. He could almost dictate his own terms to the young nobleman since only through him could Edwin hope to carry out his cherished scheme.

Mr. Dalrymple thought he had found a gold-mine. He was not clever enough to be a very bad man, but he was very far from being a good one. Long ago he had taken a heavy bribe to hold his tongue; silence had really seemed to him the safest course, but now that he had taken a retainer on the other side he meant to speak, unless, indeed, those who desired his silence outbid Lord Delamere.

"Give me three months," was his sole stipulation; and Lord Delamere, who saw no way of accomplishing his desires unaided, had to agree to the bargain, though he chafed at the delay.

Meanwhile Posy came out of the hospital, a pale, careworn little creature, but with face a little less pinched, a trifle less prematurely aged than it had been before.

His love for her was perhaps the best feeling of Gentleman Jack's life.

He offered Posy to share in his good fortune. There was plenty of room for her in the com-

fortable lodgings, but Posy shook her head decidedly. There was a vein of thorough independence about the little waif. Moreover, Posy was a young person of intense prejudices. Just as she loved Gentleman Jack she hated his friend and ally. She was quite sharp enough to guess that her friend's changed circumstances were owed to the man who had followed her so closely the day of the accident, and she would have nothing to do with them.

"I don't like him," said the waif, stoutly, when Jack had been trying for the last time to shake her resolution. "It's no use you telling me he's a good friend to you. I don't believe it."

"Posy!"

The girl shivered. It was the day before she would leave the hospital; a bright sunshiny afternoon, and yet she shivered, as though stricken with a chill.

"There's a look in his eyes I can't bear," she said, slowly; "and I wish you wouldn't trust him; there'll evil come of it."

But Mr. Dalrymple was not going to give up his gold-mine on 'the bidding of the little

waif, favourite of his though she was; so he went back to his comfortable lodgings, and Poy returned to her trade of selling flowers or watercresses, according to the season, and no one but a very keen watcher would have said she was much concerned at the absence from the Alley of Gentleman Jack.

But she was; the poor starved heart that had had no one to love had turned in a passion of gratitude to the one creature who had been kind to her.

Poy loved Gentleman Jack with a child's innocence and a woman's devotion. Hard as she had to work to keep body and soul together, she found time to ferret out how he was going on. Poy was as sharp as a needle; she paid visits to the street where he lived; she listened, she asked questions, and piecing out the story for herself, she came to the conclusion that Mr. Hawkins—she knew him by no other name—wanted something done he was ashamed to do himself and therefore meant to pay her friend to undertake. All the shame and punishment of detection or failure to be Jack's; all the gain and profit of success to be his employees.

"I hate 'im. I do," said the waif to herself when she had drawn her conclusions. "I wish he'd never followed me to the hospital, and heard where Jack lived; if only I'd refused to tell where I come from!"

It was quite early in the day, but Poy had sold all her flowers. Unusual good fortune and some benevolent soul noticing the weary little face had given her a shilling—actually a whole shilling—over and above the price of the bunch of mignonette they had purchased.

A whole shilling! Poy decided she might take a holiday until the time when it would be late enough to begin her cress selling. Experience had taught her some folks mostly liked cresses for tea, and so she strolled off in the direction of the quiet street whither, on his accession to fortune, her friend had removed.

She met him emerging from his own door dressed as she had never seen him before, a small travelling-bag in his hand.

"You're just in time to say good-bye, Poy," he said, carelessly. "I'm going a journey."

"Where to?" asked Poy, sincerely, for, unlike many street girls, she was not given to much speaking.

"Into the country. Don't you wish you were coming, too?"

"No," and Poy shook her head decidedly. "Who'd buy flowers in the country? Folks say they are to be had there just for the picking."

"Wouldn't you like to pick some?"

Poy gave a little sigh. Once she had stood next a girl who came from the country, and had entertained her with stories of blue sky and green fields. To see such things for herself seemed to Poy a glimpse of Paradise.

Jack Dalrymple caught the sigh, and pitied the child from his heart. She was such a quaint, old-fashioned little creature; she knew more of life's realities than many old women; and yet, in spite of all, she had managed to keep something of childhood's simplicity.

"You shall go, Poy," he said, kindly. "I will take you."

You, dressed up like that!" cried Poy, disdainfully; "folks 'd say you picked me out of the gutter."

"Well, Poy, I will buy you a return-ticket, and you shall go in the same train as I do, and look about the fields till you are tired, then the train will bring you back."

"But my cressen," objected Poy.

"I'll buy them all," returned Jack. "See here's a shilling to pay for them, and now you're going to have a real treat, and forget all about Bat's Alley for a little while."

The money he would spend on the treat would represent Poy's earnings for a month, but it never came into the man's head it would have been better to give it her. In fact, he knew she would not have taken it. A day

in the country in the beautiful summer weather must do her good; and, somehow, he did not like to see the little face growing thinner and more pinched every day. Why should not Poy have a treat just for once?

He took her into a pastry-cook's shop and bought her a bag of buns; then they went to the railway station, and he saw her safely into the train, giving directions to the guard to see she got out at Blakesleigh.

There was a grain of superstition in his nature; he did not quite like the errand on which he was bound. Perhaps, he thought, the little kindness to this outcast child was a kind of atonement for the other act, which certainly was no kind one.

They reached Blakesleigh safely. He saw Poy on the platform and would have spoken to her, but she shook her little head at him.

"You're a fine gentleman," she said, sharply, "and musn't be seen speaking to me. There was a woman in the carriage said most flowers grew at Marden, and I'm off there; if I've time, perhaps I'll come to-morrow and tell you all about it."

She spoke with the importance of a woman. She gave one look round at the clear blue sky; the tall, leafy trees, luxuriant in their summer pride. She saw the tall summits of the Cathedral, and heard the ripple of the water as it ran between the hills, and it was all so strange and wonderful to her that she said simply—

"I reckon it's only good people who lives here, Mr. Jack? The sky's too blue for the bad ones."

It was a childish idea that the blue sky meant Heaven. The words were but a simple thought flitting through the childish brain, but they fell reproachfully on Jack's heart. If only good people lived in this favoured spot, what right had he there? It was two years turned since he had been at Marden—only two years—but, oh! what a gulf between then and now. He had been a little fast, a little reckless, when last he stood on that rustic platform, but there had been no black stain on his name; no terrible remorse then, grinding at his heart, while now—

That was the pity of it. Those two years held such a long record against him, had left him laden with so many sins, he hardly dared to think of the future. Lord Delamere might give him money, might even settle it so that he could not dissipate it in advance, and must, in spite of himself, be comfortably off.

But Lord Delamere could not bring back the father whose heart he had broken; could not restore his self-respect and give him a new future, unstained by hideous memories. No. Gold could purchase much, but it could not achieve such things as these.

He knew he was acting a cruel part on this sweet summer day, knew that for the sake of money, he meant to strike a cowardly blow at those already in trouble by breaking the silence they had purchased. And yet he meant to do it. Six weeks ago he had settled down to life in Bat's alley, relieved by wild frocks of extravagant dissipation immediately after receiving his monthly allowance. To-day he felt he could not go back to such an existence. Edwin Delamere had promised to make a new man of him; to pay his passage to a distant colony, and start him handsomely in business, where he might hope to make a home for himself. It had been a cruel temptation, that offer to send the man where no one knew his past, where he could make in all ways a fresh start. Edwin Delamere knew all the fascination such a dream would have for Jack Dalrymple before he made his offer, and therefore I hold his part in the work to be done at Marden was easier far than that of his tool. Jack Dalrymple stroved to achieve the promised reward—a fresh start where his past was unknown; but Edwin Delamere had no object but that terrible thirst for vengeance which seemed to have taken possession of him ever since his brother's death.

CHAPTER VI.

We left our heroine standing in the little chapel belonging to the community, a bridal veil over her soft brown hair, and the man who for months had been her hero at her side.

Poor little Nell! She did not in the least realize what was happening to her. It had all been so sudden, so wonderful. She had never meant to marry; she had thought her life would always be lonely, and now the lord of Marden Hall, whose story had first awoke her sleeping heart, and whose face seemed to her that of one of the brave knights of olden days, had asked her to be his wife.

She had been given very little time for decision. Sister Ida and Dr. White had told her Sir Royal Charteris would certainly be accused of murder, and if she were called as a witness against him her testimony must prove his guilt. Nell answered she would not go to Court. They might hide her; she would go abroad, anything in the world rather than that Sir Royal should be sent to death by act of hers.

Doctor and Sister both gave her the same answer. The law would have power to search for her wherever she went. Only in one way could her testimony against Sir Royal be averted—if before she were called on to give it she had become his wedded wife. Nell protested she never meant to marry. Sir Royal knew nothing of her. Sister Ida put the case before her plainly, and, as it seemed to the kind old doctor, a little cruelly. There was no time for considerations of that kind. The question was simply this—would she marry Sir Royal, or would she let her words send him to a violent death?

Nell begged for delay, and was told delay would be fatal. To be complete the sacrifice must be prompt, and then the poor child had hidden her face on the Sister's bosom, and whispered pitiably—

"Anything to save him!"

Perhaps it was merciful for Nell that she had very little suspense. Her consent was given before noon on Tuesday. Dr. White left her there, sending a composing draught to still the nervous agitation which was consuming her. Indeed she needed repose, poor child, after Monday's tragedy, and all the excitement she had undergone. She slept peacefully as a baby till late on Wednesday, and then Sister Ida, who chose to take Sir Royal's consent as a matter of course, had arranged everything for the wedding to take place that evening, although she was well aware that the bridegroom could not hear of the proposal until Dr. White's return from London. Mr. Drake was an old friend of the Superior's, and to him she confided the facts of the case. Perhaps in her heart of hearts Sister Ida congratulated herself on the Bishop's absence from Marden. "My lord," could not perform the slightest clerical act without trying to make a grand function out of it. Had poor Nell's destiny been confided to him he would have published it to the world by telegraphing in all directions for a string of clergy to "assist" him, and would most likely have gone to London to consult some authority as to whether it was not derogatory to a Bishop to marry a bridegroom who certainly was, in some measure, a suspected criminal.

Mr. Drake was widely different from my lord. He listened to the Sister's story (be very sure his silence about it had first been requested) with intense interest, and when she had persisted, said simply—

"Poor child, poor child!"

Sister Ida felt indignant. For the life of her the woman who had once loved Royal Charteris could not understand how any girl could need pity for becoming his wife!

"I think it is Poor Sir Royal," she said slowly. "Think of his sacrifice—a Baronet, with wealth and every personal gift, compelled to marry a simple, unformed girl whom he has hardly seen!"

"But he does it to save his life. Besides, he must grow to care for her when he thinks of all she has sacrificed for him, even were she other than the sweet-faced girl we know."

"Helena is a good little thing!" said the Superior slowly; "but not in the least likely to attract a man like Sir Royal."

"I call her fascinating!"

"She was sent here nearly two years ago because her relations found her a dead weight on their hands; but for some old-fashioned prejudice against Anglican convents I am certain they would have been rejoiced for her to take the veil."

The Vicar shook his head.

"She has not the least vocation for a Sister's life. Believe me, Sister Ida, that child was made to be a happy wife, the sunshine of some good man's home; and now will you let me see her?"

"Is it necessary?"

Mr. Drake looked grave.

"We are old friends, Sister Ida, and you may not be offended if I speak plainly. I cannot agree to perform the ceremony unless I have assured myself Miss Fortescue is no unwilling bride."

Sister Ida looked displeased. (Sisters are not quite angels, reader mine, neither is a Sisterhood quite Heaven, though no doubt far on the way to it.) "I see no occasion for it surely," and she smiled. "You don't think I have forced Nell into submission?"

"I don't think that; but she is a sensitive creature, and she may have taken up the notion that for Sir Royal's sake she is bound to marry him."

The Vicar went into the large apartment known as the Common Room. Nell sat in the window darning some of the industrial's stockings (articles which were always in need of such attention). She started as she saw the kind old man, and then a deep pink colour dyed her cheeks as he went up to her and said gravely,—

"Can you put your work away for a little, Miss Fortescue, and come out into the sunshine? I want to talk to you."

Phyllis Ward was at Nell's side, and the little black sheep of the band of workers looked appealingly at the Vicar.

"Oh, Mr. Drake!" she cried, "what have we been doing now? What are you going to scold Nell for?"

"Nothing!" declared the Vicar reassuringly; "and I did not know you had been doing anything wrong, Miss Ward, what is it?"

"Sister Ida always says I am too worldly, and that I try to make Nell as bad; so I thought, may be, she had told you so."

"Sister takes her confidences about you young ladies to the Bishop; I am quite innocent of them."

"Then it wasn't you who changed our seats?"

"Changed your seats!" exclaimed the Vicar; "my dear, what do you mean?"

"On Sundays," explained Phyllis. "You see, Mr. Drake, we never see people any other days; and that was our one little glimpse of the world. We used to go quite early and look round before the service began to see who was there, and who had got new bonnets; and now," drearily, "we are poked behind, with a perfect boundary on all sides of Sisters and industrialists. I can't see anything else now, and so I look straight into my lap."

"Poor girl!" said the Vicar, with a smile; "but I assure you, though I'm sorry, I see no way of altering it, so do cheer up!"

"I'll try," promised Phyllis. "It has one good point—as we can't see anyone no one can see us, and so we can wear shabby gowns."

There was a smile on Mr. Drake's face, but it had faded when he and Nell were in the garden beyond the range of Phyllis Ward's keen eyes, and so he took leave of her.

"My dear child," he began gravely, "the Superior has been talking to me about you. She has told me of your generosity, and asked if I will perform the ceremony to-night."

Nell shivered just a little.

"Must it be so soon?"

"Miss Fortescue. It shall never be at all, so far as I am concerned, if you have any feeling of compunction, my dear. Let me speak to you as your own father might do. Do you wish to marry Sir Royal Charteris?"

"I can't bear to think of what may happen if I don't."

"Put the consequences aside. Tell me, do you think you can be happy as his wife?"

"If he loved me," she whispered; "no one has ever done that really."

Mr. Drake felt relieved.

"You think, then, that Sir Royal's affection would win your own?"

Nell blushed.

"If only he loved me," she said, faintly, "I should be quite happy—only—"

"Only what?"

"Marriage is for all time," said Nell, with a half sob. "Don't you think some day, when the memory of his danger had worn off, he might be sorry?"

"Never!" answered the Vicar firmly, "If he accepted your sacrifice now, be sure he would never regret it. I have known him all his life. He is a good man and true. If this had come about in any other way—I mean, if you had had time to become acquainted with each other—I should have said no two people could have been better suited."

"But I am only a friendless orphan, and he is Sir Royal Charteris. Why, Mr. Drake, my own relations think me a burden!"

"Never mind. Sir Royal will cherish his wife too fondly for her to need outside affection. You have taken a weight off my mind, Miss Fortescue. I had feared Sister Ida might have overpersuaded you into consenting. Now I feel that you take this step of your own free will."

Nell bowed her head.

"Of my own free will."

A wave of excitement swept over St. Hilda's, of course. The whole community would not be admitted into the secret, but sufficient had happened publicly to agitate a household whose usual course was of the most regular and matter-of-fact character. The murder so near them, within a stone's throw, so to speak, of their gardens—why, the murder alone, would have kept the workers in gossip for a month. Then there was Nell's illness, the Superior's agitation, and Mr. Drake's visit. St. Hilda's felt itself quite important, and the five workers watched Nell's slight figure at the Vicar's side as they returned from that little ramble with intense anxiety.

"What could he want to say to her?"

"Nell is never in scrapes!" said Hester Stanhope, decidedly. "Now, if it had been you, Phyllis."

"It generally is me," said Phyllis, a little dejectedly. "I seem endowed with a most unlucky knack of getting into scrapes. Sister Joan was scolding me only yesterday about the red feather in my hat. I do think the murder might put such trifles out of her head. Ah! here comes Nell."

But Nell did not join them. She gave them a little nod, and went on to the Superior's room. They saw no more of her till at tea.

Sister Ida sent Phyllis to carry Nell's tray, adding she might stay and bear her company if she liked.

Phyllis did like, and when Nell Fortescue told her secret, and asked Phyllis to be her bridesmaid, her surprise knew no bounds.

"But you never meant to marry any one," she objected. "I really thought you would end by being a sister."

"You see I am going to marry."

"And Sir Royal Charteris? Why, you'll be a real live ladyship!"

"I never thought of that."

Phyllis gave her an affectionate little shake.

"What did you think of, then? It can't be love; for I am sure you have hardly spoken to him. Why are you going to marry Sir Royal?"

"I can't tell you. Oh, Phyllis! won't you hope we shall be happy?"

Phyllis kissed her fondly.

"I'll hope you may be happy, Nell. As to Sir Royal, I have no doubts of it. Why, child, a man couldn't be miserable with you if he tried. When's the wedding to be, soon?"

"To night."

Phyllis dropped her tray in bewilderment.

"Are you dreaming, Nell? Why, you are only just engaged! Besides, weddings are always in the daytime."

"I am not dreaming, dear; and I can't explain it to you, but it is to be to-night in the chapel."

"Then that is what Mr. Drake wanted?"

"Yes."

"And will they all know?"

"No one will know but the Vicar and Sister Ida besides myself. I can trust you, Phyllis."

"Of course you can," declared Phyllis. "But, Nell, I feel as if all my ideas were turned topsy-turvy. You're the last girl in the world I should have expected to have a stolen wedding."

"It's not that."

"A hurried one, then! None of your own people there or anything. What will they say?"

"Sister thinks they can't mind."

"Well, Nell, the strangest part of it to me is her approving. I'm sure ever since I've been here they've taught us married life is nothing but vanity and trouble. When she's most spiteful Sister Ida says I require the discipline of married life; but you, her favourite, to hurry you into matrimony like this is wonderful! I can't help thinking she's gone out of her mind!"

Nell shook her head.

"And what are you going to wear?"

"This," replied the bride-elect, simply.

"Black! My dear child, you're sure to be unlucky. A bride ought to wear white!"

"But I haven't a white dress, Phyllis," and the voice was very wistful. "Please be kind to me; it is all so strange, and I feel so tired."

Phyllis kissed her fondly.

"Don't fret," she said, in a protecting way that suited her wonderfully. "I daresay you'll be very happy; and you know, Nell, you never were like other people, so it's right you should have a different sort of wedding. I only wish it was me. Why, you'll be the richest woman in Highshire!"

She was that already, if they had only known the contents of her grandfather's will.

Sister Ida came in presently with the lace veil, and fixed it herself on the soft hair. There was something gentler than usual in the Superior's manner. Even Phyllis felt the difference; and then, before either of the girl's quite knew what to say to her, Sister Ida had left them to welcome Sir Royal, and then, a moment later, the little party had gathered in the chapel.

Phyllis never cared to speak of that wedding much; it made the tears come into her eyes.

"You see," she told someone, "I was fond of Nell, and I knew he couldn't love her. She has just one of those hearts which can't be happy without love, and when I saw her in her long lace veil I couldn't help wondering whether a day would ever come when she'd regret that night's work. But Nell gave no sign of regretting it then. She made her responses in a clear, distinct voice; and when Sir Royal took her hand to put on it the magic golden circlet it never trembled. He marvelled at her calmness, and put her down as a heartless coquette, thankful to take advantage of his distress to become of lady of title."

He little guessed that her apathy was the result of fatigue and overwrought feeling—that she had felt and suffered so much in the last eight-and-forty hours, nothing seemed to have the power to move her much.

It was over. The knot death only could untie had been fastened in a very few moments. Of the three witnesses Dr. White was the

most relieved; he had feared the bride's strength would hardly last through the ceremony, brief as it was.

As for the Superior, her expression was one of stony fortitude—her face betrayed nothing, but it took a good deal to overawe Phyllis Ward; and with a smile on her lip she was going to turn back the heavy lace veil for Nell to sign the register, but the bride, with a whispered word, forbade her. The face was still veiled, and Nell extricated one little hand from its heavy folds to sign her name for the last time.

"Is it over?" asked Sir Royal.

"Quite," returned the Vicar. "You are as truly married as though the bishop had performed the ceremony before a crowded congregation in the cathedral. I hope you may be happy."

Sir Royal muttered something between his teeth, then he gave his hand to Nell, and led her slowly down the aisle, followed by Phyllis, Sister Ida, and the doctor, while Mr. Drake remained to put off his surplice.

Only when they stood in the open air did it occur to Sir Royal that he did not know in the least what to do with the new-made Lady Charteris in all the discussions respecting the marriage. Its necessity and its haste had alone been urged. No one had ever said a single word respecting the future course of the bride and bridegroom; and now Sir Royal stood irresolute, wondering if the "young woman" could be left at St. Hilda's, or whether she expected him to install her at once as lady of Marden Hall.

It was unaccountable that they should have ignored this simple question, that one and all of the six who had spoken of the marriage should yet never have said a single word of what was to happen to the newly-wedded pair after the ceremony was over.

Sir Royal looked inquiringly at Sister Ida. Surely she would understand his predicament, and give him some instructions as to how he should dispose of his new-made wife. The Superior saw that anxious glance, and was about to speak, when one of the bigger industrialists, who was allowed to act as portress, rushed towards the party, too frightened to remember ceremony or the rule which forbade anyone to disturb Sister Ida while engaged with visitors.

"Oh, Sister, Sister!" cried the shock-headed damsel; "there's two men at the gate, and they will come, in spite of all I can say; they be following me now, and they say they'll search the house through every room of it."

Sister Ida's face grew very pale as she looked at Sir Royal. He, too, knew what the men wanted, and who they were; but he was a Charteris, and he never flinched at the prospect which lay before him. Perhaps, he reflected, it would at least solve the difficulty which had so puzzled him.

Christina had said the truth; the men were following her closely. They came up almost as soon as she had finished speaking. Sister Ida stepped forward, standing so as to screen Nell from their view. Sir Royal dropped his wife's hand, and took his place at the Superior's side. A queenly woman looked she in her heavy black robes, as she stood there and addressed the unwelcome intruders.

"What is the meaning of this unseemly visit?"

"Beg pardon, ma'am!" said one of the men, civilly; "but duty's duty. Sir Royal Charteris was seen to come here, so here we had to come after him. There's a warrant out for his arrest on the charge of—"

Sir Royal interrupted them.

"I am quite ready," he said, slowly. "I never hurt a hair of the man's head, but I quite expected it would come to this."

He advanced to the two men, erect and dignified, looking more like a nobleman about to listen to some petition than a criminal awaiting arrest. There was no trace of guilt or even of fear in his aspect.

"Where shall you take me?" he demanded, gravely, of the senior of the two men.

"To Blakesleigh, Sir Royal! The coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder, and you'll have to go before the magistrate to-morrow!"

"So be it," returned the Baronet, gravely. "Dr. White," to his kind old friend, "will you go to the Hall and break the news to my servants? Some of them have grown old in our family, and deserve not to hear this first from public gossip."

The doctor turned his head, and Sir Royal turned once more to the two men.

"I am ready!"

Sister Ida took his hand and held it a moment or two longer than is usual for an ordinary farewell; but the woman who was to bear his name stood motionless. Poor little Nell seemed frozen into stone. One time she tried to speak, but her trembling lips could not obey her. Not until her husband was out of sight did she find her voice. Then she turned to the Vicar with a kind of choked sob.

"Oh, sir! will they kill him?"

"I hope not—I trust not. He is in Heaven's hands. Lady Charteris, and Heaven does not destroy the innocent. Let that comfort you."

Phyllis felt the trembling of the hand she took, and was seized with an inspiration.

"Nell is tired to death," she said to Sister Ida. "Let me take her in and put her to bed, or she will be ill again."

The doctor interposed.

"I am ready to escort Lady Charteris home at once," he said, kindly; "and if the Superior could spare you, I am sure it would be a comfort to your friend to have you with her."

Phyllis looked perplexed.

"Take Nell away! When Sir Royal has gone to prison what would she do alone in that great deserted house?"

"It is her home henceforward," said Sister Ida, coldly. "The same danger which caused her marriage requires her this very night to take her place as mistress of Marden Hall."

Nell rallied her courage. After all anything was better than staying at St. Hilda's, exposed to the endless questions of the whole community, not to say of all the workers.

"I am quite ready!"

"And you will spare Miss Ward?" urged the doctor to Sister Ida. "Indeed, Lady Charteris is not fit to be alone."

Sister Ida shrugged her shoulders.

"It is very inconvenient," she said, sharply, "but I suppose I must. Remember, Phyllis, I expect you to behave discreetly, and not go gadding about reflecting discredit on St. Hilda's."

"I could not leave Nell to go gadding about," returned Phyllis, in a strangely gentle voice. "You may trust me to take care of her."

With tender hand she unfastened the lace veil, and herself replaced it by a plain straw hat. Sister Ida promised to let one of the industrialists bring a bag of necessary things later, so the two girls took no luggage with them.

Dr. White gave Nell his arm. Phyllis was on her other side. Not a word was spoken after they had said farewell to St. Hilda's; perhaps the hearts of all of them were too full for speech. Only when they had passed the lodge and were walking up the avenue Phyllis asked, suddenly,—

"Shall you tell the servants?"

"Of the arrest? That was one of my chief reasons for coming; the other was to try to be of use to your friend."

"I meant, should you tell them of the marriage?"

"They know it."

"I know it already."

"I spoke to the housekeeper before we left. She knows that Sir Royal was to be married to Miss Fortescue to-night."

"Then she expects Nell?"

"I can hardly say that; I know that Lady Charteris will be welcomed with all due respect."

And she was. The butler threw open the hall door and revealed all the servants drawn up in a long line, with Mrs. Carter at their

head. The dejected look on every face told the truth—that they knew of their master's captivity.

Dr. White felt his tidings were forestalled.

"Sir Ralph has been taken to Blakesleigh," he said, simply, "my friends, to answer for a crime he never did. It may be he will not be able to return to you for some days, but you who know the Charteris motto, 'Truth before all,' will understand your master is the victim of a cruel mistake. In his absence I have to present to you your mistress, and beg you, for the love you bear Sir Royal, to show all respect and honour to his wife."

They knew just how it was, and for what reason Sir Royal had rushed headlong into matrimony; but when they looked on the fair, girlish face, looking so childish and innocent, a great pity filled their hearts. She was so pretty; she looked so sad, and she had been willing to give the whole future into Sir Royal's keeping rather than a word of hers should harm him.

From all those throats there came a kind of smothered sob, and many a voice re-echoed the butler's husky words, "Heaven bless her."

She was so unlike the stately dames who had ruled at Marden, and different from the handsome matrons whose pictures hung in the long gallery; just a slip of a girl with golden brown hair and soft, velvety eyes; a creature with a sad, almost wistful expression, as though life had not been all smiles for her. Truly, her lot seemed hard. Married suddenly to a man who had no love for her; robbed by the law of her husband within an hour of their union, and now brought, alone and unexpected, to the stately house over which hung the shadow of a great trouble!

Dr. White withdrew, and Mrs. Carter herself took the bride up to a handsome suite of rooms on the first floor. She longed to speak some word of sympathy, but none would come, and it was Nell at last who broke the silence.

"You were his nurse, I think; they said so. You know he never did it—He couldn't have done it, you know!"

"No, my lady," said the old servant, respectfully. "All those who know Sir Royal will feel that—Ahl but it's a sad home-coming for you."

Phyllis waited till the door had closed on the housekeeper, then she went up to Nell and kissed her. The caress broke down the bride's composure. She sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Oh, Nell!" said Phyllis, clasping her arms around her, "don't cry like that. Think how many people believe he is innocent."

"It isn't that," sobbed Nell.

"What then?" a terrible fear awaiting her.

"Oh, Nell, are you regretting it already?"

Nell dashed the tears from her eyes.

"If I could have the time over again, Phyllis, I should do just the same; but I am so frightened."

"Of what, dear?" bending over her. "Nell, can't you trust me?"

Nell hid her face on her friend's shoulder.

"I love him so," she whispered. "Oh, Phyllis, I think I loved him before ever I saw him. If he ever comes to regret that he married me—if he can't learn to love me back again—I think it will break my heart."

Phyllis felt ready to cry too, but for Nell's sake she battled with the desire, and spoke practically, almost harshly.

"You are just overtired, Nell, and must go to bed. Oh, what a liberty I am taking in calling you by the old name still! I suppose I ought to say Lady Charteris; and now I won't utter another word, for your ladyship must try to sleep."

But no sleep came to Nell's brown eyes. She lay awake all night, thinking a little of the fearful night she had witnessed by the river's bank, and a great deal of the husband who did not love her, and to whom alas! with girlish romance, she had given the first fervour of her pure young heart.

(To be continued.)

TRUE AS THE STARS.

—O—

CHAPTER XVII.

A VERY ODD YOUNG MAN.

THERE was a clatter of many tongues and of much laughter in the drawing-room when Rhoda entered, dressed in the pretty gown of pale pink gauze which Mason had packed with such care. There was a sudden silence as she came in, which always gives you an unpleasant sensation, but Lady Diana came forward with a smile, and hoped she had already made herself at home at Castle Stuart.

"I think it the loveliest place I have ever seen!" Rhoda answered, truthfully.

"I came on to the lawn to find you," said Lady Diana, mendaciously; "but here we never look for people much, because they are apt to think it is pleasant to be lost."

"So Mr. Wyndham told me when I asked for you."

"That was only an excuse to keep you to himself. I hope you treated him well?"

"Not too well," murmured the Hon. Percy Wyndham, who was accustomed to being spoilt by almost every woman he came across.

He was looking very spruce in his evening clothes, with Rhoda's rose-bud in his button-hole, and had been bending very low over a pretty girl with arched eyebrows, whose conversation seemed to interest him, but the moment his own "table-companion" came in he placed himself by her side.

"You must mend that," laughed his cousin. "And now take Miss Macdonald into dinner, and amuse her as well as you can."

Rhoda was in the seat of honour, for, in the absence of his uncle, the Earl, Percy took the bottom of the table.

Certainly she could not complain of the dulness of Castle Stuart, for Percy, exerting his conversational powers to the utmost, made her laugh more in one hour and a half than she generally did in a whole month.

The whole scene was so different to anything she had ever seen before that she could not but enjoy it. The splendour of the silver plate, the exquisite texture of the fragile glasses, the beauty of the flowers with which the table was profusely decked, the crowd of powdered footmen in attendance, the lightness of the conversation, the sparkling of jewels on every side, the laughing glances, the gay repartees—oh, how different it all was to those quiet, hum-drum dinners at Summer Lodge!

Her spirits rose as the sense of strangeness wore off, and Mr. Wyndham did nothing more dreadful than devote himself entirely to her. It is true that as he raised his champagne glass to his lips he murmured something which sounded dreadfully tender, but his eyes sparkled as if he were doing it only for fun, and as he said it so low, she could affect not to hear.

After dinner they all trooped out on to the terrace, and sauntered up and down, the men smoking, the girls inhaling the delicate tobacco smoke as if they liked it.

An adjournment to the drawing-room was made after awhile, as soon as the sound of a band was heard playing softly inside the Castle.

"Shall we stay outside in the moonlight, or go in and dance?" Percy asked, as they reached one of the tall French windows, and looked in at the lighted room, with its painted panels and hanging draperies.

"Go in and dance!" said Rhoda, promptly, for she was not old enough to be blasé.

Mr. Wyndham put his arm round her waist as soon as the threshold of the window was crossed, and whirled her off quietly; taking it for granted that she could wish for no other partner. Indeed, it seemed to be the rule at Castle Stuart that there should be no change of partners; and, to judge from the effect, the method seemed to answer. Nobody

was either dull or bored; in fact, everybody seemed to have a joke, and be ready to share it with anybody else.

Very often two people would actually stop still in the middle of a waltz, because they were laughing so much that they could not go on; but Percy would never explain the cause of the merriment, although he seemed to understand all about it. Indeed, from the way in which his moustaches twitched, and his eyes twinkled, it was evident that he was quite prepared to join in it. Rhoda was perplexed, but he did not allow her any time for private reflection; and when she said she was tired, and would like to go to bed, he gave in, lighted her candle from a number which were standing in silver candlesticks on the hall-table, and escorted her up the broad flight of stairs along the gallery to the door of her room. There he halted, and looked down into her pretty face with an amused smile on his own.

"I will let you off easily to-day for your own sake; but to-morrow—," and then he put the candlestick into her hand, and, with a low bow, departed.

To-morrow! What did he mean? With a vague fear of the future she entered her room, but her fears were dispelled by the sight of Mason's homely face. Mason had made herself look just like a ladies' maid, with a black silk dress, and a neat white muslin apron; but whatever she put on she only looked quietly respectable, and never smart, which was foolish enough to regret. Whilst she was brushing out her young mistress's long brown hair, till it fell about her like a cloud through which the sun is shining, she went into ecstasies over the beauty of the castle, the splendour of the plate, the lavish extravagance of the housekeeping.

"From what I've seen already the house-bills must be hundreds of pounds a-week. There was a dinner of I don't know how many courses, for the Earl in his private apartments. Then there was another for the young lord and his tutor, Mr. Marshall, besides all that went into the dining-room. Oh! dear, if the mistress at home saw it, I believe it would be enough to turn her hair grey on the spot."

"Not if my aunt hadn't got to pay for it," said Rhoda, quietly.

"To be sure, miss, that do make a difference! They say that the lady here is engaged to a plain, simple gentleman, without a title, in Egypt. I beg your pardon, did I pull your hair? You seemed to jump so. And the Earl don't think the match half grand enough, so Miss Jennings tells me, that waits on Lady Diana."

"Oh, be quick, Mason! I'm longing to go to bed," cried the poor girl, wearily. Was she always to be reminded that the man who was her husband had once pledged his faith to another? How strange it was that nobody ever seemed to know that the engagement was broken off! Of course, Douglas must have told Lady Diana that she was free, and why did she let it be supposed that she was still engaged? She cried herself to sleep that night, after all the laughter and fun; for how could she be happy except for a few minutes together, when the only man she loved was at the war? Very late in the morning she stole downstairs, very much ashamed of having overslept herself.

Percy Wyndham greeted her with eager, outstretched hands. "At last, Rhoda! I'm positively starving; but, of course, I couldn't begin till you came."

"You don't mean to say you waited?"

"You knew I should. Did you dream of me? You did; I see it in your face. Some coffee at once (to the footman); hot rolls, fish, and anything you've got."

When the servants had left the room, having supplied all their wants, Percy drew his chair a little nearer. "We shall have to keep the rules better to-day," he said, in a business-like tone. "They all seem to think we didn't make sufficient way; but you know

there's no use in being in a hurry, and we can put on the pace whenever we like."

"I don't understand," said Rhoda, who had already got into such a habit of blushing that her face was rarely its proper colour.

Percy bit the end of his moustaches to keep from laughing. "I will explain everything to you most clearly before long; and don't forget, under all circumstances, that I'm your brother. Just look at my scarf; does it set right? Please alter it if it doesn't!"

"Oh, perfectly!" giving it a shy glance.

"You scarcely looked at it," with an injured air. "Now, tell me, shall we stroll about the place this morning, and go out for a ride in the afternoon?"

"That would be delightful!" her eyes lighting up. "I brought my habit, but would Lady Diana lend me a horse?"

"You would ride one of mine, of course. I should not let any one else mount you."

"Before we do anything else I must write to my aunt," she said, as they rose from breakfast.

"Pray be careful. Don't paint me blacker than you can help. I've tried to give satisfaction all round," plainively.

"Good morning," said Lady Diana, nodding to them both from the window. "Come and play tennis; the lower lawn is in the shade."

"Miss Macdonald is just about to write home and bring a heavy indictment against you and me," said Percy, getting out his cigarette case.

A change passed quickly over Lady Diana's face; but she only inquired if Miss Macdonald would object to playing tennis first and writing afterwards. Rhoda naturally assented to the arrangement, and her hostess contrived that she should be so fully engaged during the rest of the day that she had not a moment to fly to her writing-case. When she went to bed she fully meant to write, and make up for lost time. Mason had retired with a bad headache, and she was alone. Percy had told her, rather to her alarm, that Lord Faulkner and Captain Dormer were expected that day, but they had not arrived when the ladies left the drawing-room, and the gentlemen went to the billiard-room.

Now she was certain that if she frankly explained the sort of life she was leading at Castle Stuart, and also mentioned the new additions which were going to be made to the company, her aunt would summon her home without the smallest hesitation. She was actually becoming accustomed to Mr. Wyndham's peculiarities, and she had enjoyed her ride on his horse intensely; so she was startled to find that her eager desire for flight had cooled.

She must tell the truth—there should be no further deceit on her conscience; but she knew that if she did she would be back again directly to Summer Lodge to be persecuted once more by Edward Stavely. For Virginia's sake it was certainly better that she should be away; so she sat with her pen in her hand the picture of hesitation.

There was a knock at her door, and, to her surprise, Lady Diana walked in—arrayed in a crimson-plush tea-gown, trimmed with lace ruffles.

"You haven't begun to undress? That's all right. I want you to come with me and have some fun. Kitty's outside and Joan. Take off your bracelets, and let me let down one piece of your hair, as if you had just begun pulling out one or two hair-pins, till one beautiful sunny strand of hair lay on the pearl-white neck. There, that's most becoming. Now come!"

"But where?"

"You shall see."

They joined the ladies outside, who put their fingers on their smiling lips, and entreated Rhoda to make no noise. Then they hurried down long passages, till she felt quite bewildered, and descended a small staircase.

Suddenly Lady Diana threw open a door, and exclaimed dramatically, "The neophyte!" and Rhoda, to her utter consternation, found

herself in what was evidently the smoking-room, and confronted by several men who got out of their lounging-chairs to give the ladies a rapturous greeting.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OH! WHAT A SURPRISE!

EVEN on Lady Diana's audacious face there was an expression of dismay, for, to do her justice, she had expressly stipulated that only a select few—relations of herself or of her two friends, Kitty Patterson and Joan Wingfield, should be present, and that all the other men should be detained on some pretext or other in the billiard-room.

"Percy, how could you?" she said, in a stinging aside.

"Pon my word, you are so late I thought you weren't coming!"

"What lovely hair!" exclaimed a major of dragoons, coolly putting up his eye-glass to examine Rhoda's stray lock, as if it belonged to a statue. "Have you kindly let it down to give us all a bit as a keepsake?"

Percy was by her side in a moment, for he allowed no one to be impertinent to her except himself.

"Let me go back," whispered Rhoda, her face crimson with blushes.

"Nonsense! Don't let that fool disturb you. Look at Diana; she's never put out by anything! I'll send him to the piano. He sings like a nightingale!"

In a few minutes the ladies, though rather ashamed of themselves, were comfortably seated, and held cigarettes in their hands as if they were on the point of smoking them. Major Bond took his place on the music-stool, and began to sing "Oh what a surprise!" altering the words to suit his present fancy, whilst the other men joined rapturously in the chorus. Percy, who had decoyed Rhoda into a snug little corner, was entreating her to learn how to smoke.

"Light it at the top of mine," he said, coaxingly, forcing a cigarette between her fingers, and with his good-looking young face, in his eagerness, thrust to within a few inches of hers. "You don't know how nice it is, and there is never true sympathy between two people till they have smoked together!"

"Nothing would induce me," she said indignantly; and then, because aware that Major Bond was looking at her over his shoulder, and singing, so that all might know for whom the words were intended for:—

"Two lovely brown eyes,
Oh! what a surprise!

They've stolen the heart from out of my breast,
Two lovely brown eyes!"

At that moment the door opened, and two gentlemen came into the room—Lord Faulkner and Captain Dormer. The former gave a look round of surprise and amazement, and ejaculated "Jove!" under his moustaches. The latter fixed his eyes on Rhoda Macdonald, sitting there as he thought, complacently, with one "poppy" half-kneeling by her side, and seeming on the point of thrusting the end of a cigarette between her pretty lips, whilst another was addressing insolent nonsense to her from the piano.

She met his eyes, and realised at the same time what the Major was doing, and how strange Mr. Wyndham's attitude must seem to a looker-on, together with her own position in a room only meant for men. She started from her chair, and gaining the door before any one could stop her, tore down the passage like a wild thing. She heard the door shut with a slam, and footsteps hurrying after her, but she could not find the staircase by which they had come down. As she was looking about her in nervous haste,—

"This way," said a voice which she thought must be Mr. Wyndham's; and at the same time a man's arm pushed open the door of a

room like a study, and as she went in a man followed, and closed the door behind him.

There was a lamp on a writing-table, where somebody had evidently just recently been writing letters; but, without glancing round, Rhoda, utterly overcome, sank on the sofa, and hid her face in her hands.

"What am I to tell Yelverton when I write?" said Captain Dormer, sternly. "It will be pleasant news for him to hear how the girl whom he thought such a model of bashfulness and modesty has been amusing herself at Castle Stuart!"

The only answer was a sob.

His dark eyes rested on the small bent head on the snow-white chest heaving so pitifully with those long-drawn sobs, on the slender little hands through which the tears were trickling one by one; and the only sigh he gave was a frown!

"I thought poor Yel was a fool for giving so much of his heart to a girl who could behave to her own people as you did—sneaking away behind their backs for the purpose of eloping with a man whom you had only known for a couple of months."

He saw her shiver from head to foot, but, full of his responsibilities as her amateur guardian, went on pitilessly, perhaps goaded on to fierceness by the pain in his own heart, which he wished to transfer to hers.

"And now, when, if you had a scrap of decent feeling, you would be watching the reports from Egypt as if your soul hung on the news, I find you sitting in a smoking-room—by your presence there, as well as by your manners, encouraging men to be as insolent to you as they choose!"

"Oh, stop! stop!" she moaned, writhing as if his words were an actual lash from which her delicate flesh was flinching.

"Why should I stop?" he answered, mockingly. "I'm only telling you what you have done. If you were ashamed of it, may I ask why you did it? Nobody forced you. That young puppy Wyndham only wants a snubbing, and if that coarse fellow Bond needs a thrashing I'm quite ready to give it."

"I'll leave this horrid place to-morrow!" she cried, passionately. "Oh! why did I ever come!"

"No, you won't!" shaking his head, and looking down at her beautiful up-turned face with pitiless eyes. "You will stay here; because here you can gratify your vanity unchecked; here you can indulge that appetite for admiration which will end by being your curse!"

Her face was white as her dress as she stood up and tried to steady herself, clinging on to the edge of the writing-table.

"Why do you hate me so?" she asked, involuntarily, as if the words fell from her pale lips without her knowledge.

"Hate you? Good heavens!" a light suddenly breaking over the sternness of his face like the sun through a thundercloud. Then he stepped forward and gripped her by the shoulder, looking down at her with eyes that seemed to devour her shrinking beauty. "Oh, child! if you understood!"

There was something so strangely thrilling in the tone of his voice, and so inexplicable in the glance he fixed upon her, that she scarcely knew what to say.

"Yes, you've always hated me," she said, in a low voice, turning her face away.

"Hated you? I wish to Heaven I had."

And then, carried away by an uncontrollable impulse, he caught hold of that one lock of hair hanging over her shoulder so temptingly, and raised it to his lips. He saw his error in the horrified gaze she fixed upon him, as she started back. Drawing herself up like an imperial queen she said, in bitter scorn,—

"You too, Captain Dormer!"

And then her lip quivered; and feeling as if all the world were against her when the man whom she had once looked up to with eager respect had shown himself as bad as the rest, she sunk back upon the sofa with hands clasped tightly together and drooping head.

"Miss Macdonald, I was mad. I didn't mean it," he cried, in abject penitence. "I could beg your pardon on my knees."

"You've shown that you despise me as much as you hate me. Why don't you go?" raising her tear-stained face, but not looking at him.

"I can't go till you've forgiven me," stubbornly.

"Then you'll have to stay a long while."

"It was only a slip for a moment. Your hair looked so lovely. Why did you wear it like that if—if—" He stopped, and his pale face flushed.

"It was Lady Diana who pulled it down. How I wish she hadn't!"

Then, looking round, she saw a pair of scissors lying on the table, close at hand. She picked them up, and taking the lock of hair between her fingers, severed it just above the place where she considered it had been soiled.

Captain Dormer's eyes followed it as it fell upon the floor, but he bit his lip and said nothing.

"Caught," cried Lady Diana from the doorway. "I don't know what Mrs. Sumner will say to your being shut up *à la clé* with a very dangerous officer at two o'clock in the morning, and presenting him with locks of hair? Why don't you pick it up, Captain Dormer?"

"Because it is mine," said Mr. Wyndham, darting forward, and picking it up instead.

Captain Dormer looked at him fiercely, but only folded his arms across his chest, and said nothing.

Lady Diana smiled as her cousin kissed the curl rapturously, put it inside his waistcoat, and then threw himself down on the sofa by Rhoda's side, leaning over her to whisper something in her ear.

Rhoda got up instantly, and Lady Diana exclaimed, as soon as she caught sight of her face,—

"Has anything happened, or has Captain Dormer brought you bad news?"

"Nothing has happened," said the poor girl, gravely; "only I am afraid I must leave you to-morrow, Lady Diana."

"Impossible!" looking quite aghast. "We cannot possibly spare you. Percy, this must be your fault. Make your peace at once, and drive this ridiculous notion out of her head. I am going to bed."

Captain Dormer neither moved or spoke as Rhoda passed him by without taking the slightest notice of him. As she followed her hostess out of the room, Percy stuck close to her side.

"What have I done? Tell me," he whispered impressively.

She only averted her head, without a word.

"Is it about the lock of hair?"

"Throw it into the fire. If—if you have the smallest feeling of kindness for me, never let me see it again," she said, her lips trembling.

"Then I may keep it?" There was an unusual eagerness in his voice, and his face flushed.

"Miss Macdonald, will you let him keep it?" said a stern voice behind them. "If you do, I swear by Heaven that Yel shall know what is going on behind his back."

What Rhoda would have answered, or what folly Percy might have been guilty of in his anger, no one knows; for at that instant the silence in front was broken by a shrill scream; and Lady Diana, who was some distance on ahead, came flying back to them, her brilliant eyes distended with horror, her cheeks as white as her handkerchief.

"Did you hear it?" she cried, looking from one to the other. "It means trouble for one of us."

"I heard nothing but an owl hooting?" said Percy cheerfully. "Don't look so scared, Di!"

"It wasn't an owl. It was 'the white lady,' her teeth chattering. 'Oh! trouble can only

come to me through one. Douglas is dead—I know—I know it!"

Rhoda leant against the wall, shaking from head to foot.

"The last news was good," said Dormer briefly.

"Good? Do you call it good when a handful of men are thrown as a prey to thousands of savage fiends? Oh, it's wicked!—wicked! and I don't care who hears me," wringing her hands.

"Go to bed, Di!" said her cousin, soothingly. "The papers will tell us to-morrow that nothing has happened."

"What do I care about the papers when I've had my warning? Oh, Douglas! Douglas!" hiding her face in her hands.

Percy put his arm round her, and led her away, soothing and expostulating by turns; whilst Rhoda stood perfectly still, as if turned to ice; her tawny eyes staring straight before her, her lips slightly parted. The cruelty of her position seemed to freeze the life-blood in her heart. To hear her own husband lamented over by another woman, and to be obliged to stand by and make no sign, was almost more than she could bear.

Captain Dormer watched her, and all the anger and bitterness went out of his heart. "Don't be frightened," he said, gently, "the last telegrams were reassuring. If there is any news to-morrow you shall hear before you come down to breakfast."

"Thank you!" she said hoarsely; and then seeing the white light of early morning peering through the chinks of a curtained window, she dragged herself miserably to her bedroom. To-night had brought shame and humiliation. What if to-morrow brought disaster and death?

CHAPTER XIX.

"WAS IT STOLEN?"

"CAPTAIN DORMER'S compliments, and there into news of any consequence in the papers this morning, miss," were the first words which greeted Rhoda Macdonald's ears, as she was startled out of a heavy sleep into which she had but lately fallen, by Mason's appearance beside her bed. Miserably she had tossed from side to side, always tortured by the thought that her husband might be wounded, perhaps dying, and yet she never would have the right to go to him. She was so shy, so childish, and yet at one plunge she had been thrown into the wildest whirlpool of life, without a friend to help her. Bound to secrecy she could pour out her sorrows to no one—ask nobody for counsel in the most perplexing of anxieties. It was a terrible position for a young girl who had a clever unscrupulous woman for her enemy; but Rhoda had courage to bear and endure, and a bright hopeful spirit to keep her up.

The only people in the dining-room were Lady Diana and Lord Faulkner, Miss Kitty Pattison and Major Bond—breakfasting at two separate little tables, whilst Percy Wyndham was looking on, or reading some letters by a third table, where two clean plates, and two tea-cups were ready to be used, and various dainties waiting to be tasted.

"Did not expect you till midday," Lady Diana called out loud, for every one to hear, "after the frightful hour to which you sat up with Captain Dormer!"

"With Dormer?" said Lord Faulkner in a low voice, raising his eyebrows. "Really my little cousin wants looking after."

"Indeed, she does! You saw how she was going on with Percy, whilst Major Bond was making love to her from the piano!"

"Pon my word, I was never so astonished in my life. She was the shyest little thing I ever came across, a month ago, and now," he stopped expressively, whilst his large eyes roamed to the table in the window, where Percy was waiting on Rhoda assiduously whilst she was buried in a letter.

Lady Diana's eyes shone with triumph.

She had forgotten all about her fright of last night, and was once more engrossed in her unprincipled plans. With keen attention she watched her unconscious victim, and wondered what there was in the letter to disturb her composure so palpably. If it was a recall to Sumner Lodge, she determined to veto it at once; she would even take the trouble to write to Mrs. Sumner, and tell her that she must spare her niece a little longer. Anything must be tried and attempted before she would let her well-laid plans be overthrown at the outset.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Lord Faulkner, a remark which was not original, but it happened to be the only one that occurred to him.

"They are worth far more than that, and I shan't tell them. By-the-bye you were rather in love with your little cousin when I last saw you!"

"I was not aware of it."

"But I was, and every one was talking of it."

"I have never been in love but with one woman in my life," his face growing grave.

"You excite my curiosity."

"No, curiosity implies a certain amount of interest, and you never had the slightest in me. Why did you give that unearthly screech last night?"

It was Lady Diana's turn to look grave, as a shudder passed through her, which shook her visibly.

"It was nothing," she said, with affected carelessness. "Only a white owl, which, I hear one of the gardeners shot this morning. I—I took it for a ghost!"

"You believe in ghosts!" opening his eyes to their fullest extent, for this was a phase in her character which he never would have suspected.

"Only sometimes, when I'm uneasy in my mind. When there seems, as it were, a possibility of something dreadful happening. I could scarcely sleep last night; but this morning I find that the news from Egypt is exceptionally good."

Lord Faulkner's face clouded, and when it clouded its expression was the reverse of pleasant.

"It comes to this, that your fear of ghosts dates from the hour that Captain Yelverton set foot in Egypt," he said, with a sarcastic smile.

Lady Diana positively blushed; but a glorious light came into her eyes.

"You naturally grow anxious when you have something to lose."

He said nothing, but made a movement as if he were quite ready to break off the *tit-a-tit*. Lady Diana, not accustomed to such hints, rose abruptly, and sauntered to the window with a heightened colour.

"Isn't it dreadful?" said Rhoda, as she came near, looking up into her face with horror-struck eyes. "Two of the servants at Sumner Lodge have scarlet-fever; and my aunt and all the rest have turned out."

"Delighted to hear it!" was the unexpected answer, as a spider might have remarked to a fly, who had announced its intention of visiting its web.

"Lady Diana, you can't mean it!"

"Indeed, I do," with a careless laugh; "and it is bad for the domestics, but nice for us; it will prolong your stay for ages."

"I could shunt for joy," asserted Mr. Wyndham.

Rhoda looked from one to the other with flushed cheeks. After last night how could she stay. Yet how could she go away? Mr. and Mrs. Sumner were staying with some friends in Dorsetshire. Virginia and Amy were on a visit in Warwickshire. The Lodge was empty except for the two invalids and their nurses, the rest of the servants who could not be spared, and a host of disinfectants.

"But indeed, Lady Diana, I need not stay here. I—I could go somewhere else of course?"

"Perhaps back to the fever-haunted Lodge,"

she said, smiling at the poor girl's embarrassment. "If there is any chance of your attempting to run away, we will give you an additional body-guard. I'm almost afraid to suggest Captain Dormer, because he will certainly fight with Percy over that lock of hair!"

"No, no!" ready to sink into the earth in shame and confusion. "Mr. Wyndham has burnt it. I'm sure he has. Haven't you?" turning imploringly to Percy.

For all answer, he drew the long silky curl out of his waistcoat, and looking triumphantly into her face, kissed it again and again.

Lady Diana laughed mockingly; Lord Faulkner muttered an angry oath; Major Bond asked for it to be passed; and turning round in an agony of shame, Rhoda found herself face to face with Captain Dormer. One look at his stern, indignant face, and then she brushed quickly past him, and fled like a frightened hind.

"After her, Percy—follow her quick!" cried Lady Diana, her eyes shining, her heart beating fast with pleasure.

"It is an invitation," said Major Bond.

"If it weren't for Miss Patterson, I should wish I were in your shoes. Go it, Wyndham."

But Percy never moved.

"How did you become possessed of it?" asked Lord Faulkner sternly.

"She gave it him," said Lady Diana, maliciously.

"Wyndham stole it," said Frank, shortly.

"No; that I deny," said Percy, who, with flushed face, leaned against the window-frame, feeling uncomfortable as to his own conduct.

"Was it yours? I believe it must have been!" cried Lady Di, as she saw the fierce expression on Dormer's face. "It was cut off before he came into the room, so that it must have been given to you. Oh, Percy! throw it away! Captain Dormer had the first offer."

"You are mistaken," said Frank, drawing himself up stiffly, whilst his wronged face flushed darkly.

He hated all allusion to the scene in the library the night before, and loathed the remembrance of his own mistake. And now, to have it dragged into the broad light of day, was absolute torture to him.

"Then explain why it was cut off?" looking up at him with mocking eyes.

"That is Miss Macdonald's affair, not mine," and he turned away.

"I should demand an explanation of the lady herself," put in Major Bond, looking across at Wyndham. "Miss Macdonald is your property, I believe, by the rules of the 'Small Round Table.'"

"Is that true?" asked Lord Faulkner, with sudden eagerness, looking at his hostess.

She did not answer, but the Major said quickly, "As long as the month lasts, I claim my own fair Kitty till the end of August."

Miss Patterson laughed and blushed. "Lady Di," she said, mischievously, "only makes the rules for the purpose of breaking them."

"She never even told me what they were," grumbled the Viscount; "but if you will explain them, I shall know how to make use of my privileges."

"No, no," said Lady Diana, quickly, as she stepped out on to the terrace.

He followed her, and asked why he should be different to the rest.

"The rules were made for your cousin—and now that you are here—you are sure to spoil everything."

"Why should I spoil everything?" indignant at the suggestion.

"Because she is your cousin."

"That makes no difference. Look here, Lady Di," he said, slowly, "shall we strike a bargain? You talk so very seriously that I can't conceive what you mean. But I promise not to interfere, if you will obey your own rules," looking down into her face with an eager expression in his own eyes.

It was a great temptation, for she was

dreadfully afraid lest Lord Faulkner should take Rhoda under his wing, and destroy all her plans at once.

She had seen his inward mortification during the past conversation, and knew that at any moment it might break out into words.

It was now in her power to disarm him by a promise—and surely she could twist the rules to suit her own case, and break her promise whilst she seemed to be keeping it.

He waited for her to speak with a smile on his unrefined lips. A smile, which for those who could read it, was a sure index to his character.

But Lady Di was looking down at the gravel; her long lashes resting on the velvet of her cheeks, and rampant jealousy asking her to yield. Every womanly attribute of her nature warning her not to place herself in the power of this man.

And he stood perfectly silent, watching her. He perfectly understood the meaning of her indecision; but he knew that inflexible as she might seem to all the world, he could bend her, for he knew a spell.

And by this spell, he meant to draw her slowly to himself, and never loose her in spite of prayers and protestations—never give her one chance of escape—till she was snared like a bird, and her wings broken.

"If Yelverton had been here this morning, Wyndham would probably have measured his length on the floor. The sight of that lock of hair would have sent him mad," he said, slowly, as was his wont, when he meant to be impressive.

The blood rushed up into Lady Diana's face. "I don't see why," she said, haughtily.

"It was mere gossip of course," he went on, pitilessly; knowing that he would scarcely have been more cruel if he had thrust the point of a knife through the silken bodice of her dress, just where her passionate heart was beating so wildly; "but they told me he had developed a very strong penchant for my little cousin during the last week or so that he was in England."

She bit her lip till the blood came, and then after a fierce struggle with her own repugnance, she turned to him with a fascinating smile—

"It's mere gossip," she said, and her ruby lips quivered. "But out of revenge I'll keep the rules."

A look of triumph shot from his indolent eyes, but he had to control his outward gestures.

"Then I will deliver my cousin as a prey into your hands. But, as a favour, don't let Wyndham go too far."

"You wouldn't object to her being Mrs. Wyndham?"

"I object to nothing, Di," with a mocking bow.

CHAPTER XX.

A TRESS, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE month was passing away quickly, and still Captain Dormer lingered at Castlestuart, keeping his word to his absent friend, according to his own ideas. "Trying to poach on my preserves," according to Percy's.

During all this time his usually placid temper was none of the sweetest.

He could not understand his own feelings, and fancied it was for Yel's sake that his blood boiled when Rhoda passed the window, riding on Wyndham's horse, with its owner close by her side.

Was she really falling in love with a fellow whose only recommendation was his audacity? Was she already untrue to the absent soldier fighting his way through the dreary desert, encompassed by crowds of fiercest Arabs?

Was Yelverton's danger nothing to her? Was her love valueless, as mere thistle-down? Was her young heart an empty shuttle-cock tossed from hand to hand?

The answer seemed so evidently, to judge by her conduct day after day; but every now and

then he would meet her lovely eyes, and the pure, true soul of the faithful and loving girl seemed to look out of them; and his mind was unsettled once more.

What was he to think when the maddest of all frolics were always put down to Miss Macdonald's account.

Lady Diana never did anything rash or audacious without assuring everybody that she did it for Rhoda's sake. "Just to please the child, you know; she likes a bit of fun."

And how could anyone guess that the words were as false as her own intentions?

"Say you've a headache," Frank said suddenly to Rhoda, when all the company were meeting for a summons to dinner.

"I am not in the habit of telling falsehoods," she answered, drawing herself up. "I don't know why you want me to begin to-night."

"You are so proud of your truth; but can you say you have never practised deception?" he asked, scornfully.

Before she could answer dinner was announced, and Percy Wyndham came up with his most fascinating smile.

"We are going to have such a lark to-night," he said, cheerfully, as he led her off. "Hide and seek in the dark. Have you ever played at it?"

"No; I don't think I should like it at all," wondering if this game had anything to do with Captain Dormer's extraordinary request.

"Yes you will. I insist upon your liking it." His eyes twinkling. "And all the rules of the 'small round tables' are to be brought into play. But you'll hear all about it presently."

About half-past nine a number of people, apparently in the best of spirits, mounted the stairs, all laughing and talking together.

They proceeded along one side of the gallery, and turned down a passage which led towards what was called the West Wing, where there were a number of large rooms opening into each other, which were only sparsely furnished, and never used except under pressure of extraordinary numbers. The moon had not long risen, and now cast long, bright gleams of light through the tall, narrow windows, whilst the shadows were as black as Indian ink.

Rhoda shuddered, and a sudden presentiment of evil drew her involuntarily nearer to Percy's side.

"Don't be frightened. I'll take care of you," he said, gently; and then, at Lady Diana's instigation, hurried forward to shut the shutters.

This took some time, for there were a great many windows altogether in the three first rooms which opened into each other.

"Now quick this way," said Percy, catching hold of her hand and ensconcing her in the deep embrasure of a window. For once she was not sorry to have him for a companion, as he drew a heavy curtain in front of them both, and the darkness seemed to close round them ominously. "Now, remember, Bond is the man to catch us—if he comes this way, sink down on the floor, and crawl away on your hands and knees if necessary—for I wouldn't have him touch you for the world!"

"Silence!" called out somebody, and not a sound was to be heard for a few minutes.

Major Bond was evidently devoting his attention to the other room, for presently there was a scuffling of feet, and a sound of suppressed laughter.

"Miss Wingfield!" he called out, confidently, imagining that he could easily identify the lady, although he had only laid his hand on her shoulder. But he was wrong, as a number of disguised voices assured him at once; and the game went on.

To all intents and purposes Rhoda was alone with Mr. Wyndham, and she considered that she could not have a better opportunity for persuading him into giving up her lock of hair.

She asked herself what Douglas Yelverton would think if he knew that a young man—a perfectly recent acquaintance—possessed one of her rich brown curls; and she thought of the scorn in Dormer's face, when he fancied that she was willing to leave it in his hands. Yes, she must try to-night.

"Percy!" she said, softly, determined to humour him by calling him by his Christian name.

"Yes, dear," came the answer from only a few inches off.

"You will give me back that piece of hair, won't you?" coaxingly.

"Not for the world!" with great decision, although in a whisper.

"But you must. You couldn't be so cruel."

"You couldn't be so cruel as to take it away."

"But you can't care for it."

"Can't I? I'm the best judge of that."

"If you are a gentleman you'll give it up," clasping her hands imploringly.

"I thought I had a right to keep it," gravely. "Was it meant for any one else?"

"N—no!"

"Then why was it cut off?"

It was too dark for him to see the confusion plainly depicted on her face; but he guessed it from her voice, as she said very low,—

"I can't tell you!"

Now Percy Wyndham was as audacious, impertinent, and mischievous as any one could be; but his heart was not as hard as a nether millstone. And when a pretty girl wished a thing very much, he liked to satisfy her desire. At the same time he was not inclined to be too self-denying, and give everything up without reaping some advantage.

"I'll give it you on two conditions."

"Yes?" eagerly.

"First, that you'll promise not to destroy it; secondly, that you'll allow me to keep the rules of our society."

"Why shouldn't I burn the horrid thing?"

"Because I might ask for it back some day."

No answer.

"Now, as to the rules," drawing very near, "they've all been bothering me to keep them properly, but I've let you off easily because I didn't want to tease you too much. Now, if you want the curl back, you must let me keep them."

She guessed his meaning for the first time as she felt his arm steal softly round her, and grew hot all over. Oh! was there no other way? She drew back against the wall, where, through a tiny chink in the shutter, a ray of light fell across her face. She looked irresistibly lovely to Percy with that look of protest and appeal in her tawny eyes, and his smiling face came nearer, his golden moustaches all but swept her fresh, sweet lips.

Suddenly he was violently thrust aside, and Rhoda was dragged away from him. The shutter, bursting violently open at the same moment, showed him that Captain Dormer was his assailant, and, mad with rage, he threw himself upon him. Frank lost his balance, and fell sideways before he had time to defend himself. There was a crash of splintering wood and falling glass, and then the white moonlight showed but one man's form resting against the broken window-frame, where two had been struggling but a minute before.

"Oh, heaven, he's killed!" cried a girl's voice, hoarse with agony, and, like a wild thing, Rhoda Macdonald rushed across the room, and out at the door, whilst Percy stood for an instant spellbound with horror.

"What is it?"

"What on earth has happened?"

"Who broke the window?"

"Is anyone hurt?"

They all came trooping round him, and looking into his dazed face for an answer.

He tried to pull himself together as he turned to the broken window with a shudder.

(To be continued.)

WHEN TO-MORROW SHALL
BE TO-DAY.

—:—:—

WHEN to-morrow shall be to-day,
When the night shall be wept away,
Will the kindly sun make dry our tears,
As he dries the dew from the rose that
dares

To lift her fragrant face to be kissed?
Will the night's long anguish fade with its
mist
When to-morrow shall be to-day

When to-morrow shall be to-day,
When the golden stars turn grey,
And the herd to the distant hill departs,
Will the morning lark lend the song to
hearts
Which he lends to the depths of circling
sky?

As he sings serenely, shall you and I,
When to-morrow shall be to-day?

When to-morrow shall be to-day,
And flowers are fresh in the earth's bouquet,
When bird and sweetheart are building a
nest,
Will love return to an empty breast?
Will the same soft eyes again beguile,
Enchanting still with the old sweet smile,
When to-morrow shall be to-day?

When to-morrow shall be to-day,
And the clay shall return to clay,
When words of unkindness are past recall,
And willows are weeping over all,
Will our sorrows sink in the river of rest,
Will our names be numbered among the
blest,
When to-morrow shall be to-day,
When all our morrows shall be to-day?

J. L. P.

LORD OF HER LOVE.

—:—:—

CHAPTER XXVII.

DINNER at Knarlesborough Castle is a very quiet, not to say dull, affair the first evening of Miss Musgrave's arrival there; but she does not seem to be much affected by it. Her spirits are most excellent; she talks and laughs enough for the whole party, regardless of the fact that her sallies are not met with general hilarity. She is obeying orders. Sybil summoned her to her room just before they descended, and in a few concise words told her exactly what she must do, and Lottie is too wise to act contrary to Sybil's wishes.

Sadie is not present at the meal, and Lord Ardean looks grave and stern.

Sybil notices his reserve, his constraint, towards Philip, also with pain Mr. Brewer observes his host's obvious displeasure and dislike. She is very quiet, but her spirits are equally as high as Lottie's.

"It is passing all description," she says, to herself. "Who would have imagined that fortune would have treated me so kindly? The mystery is deeper now than I imagined. That girl's secret is not only a great one, but an awful one to her. What can it be, and what connection has Gerald Musgrave with it? I must work on that string—I must test her again and again. Can she be mixed up in his disappearance? It seems credible. Her start when she first met Lottie, what does that argue? That she traced some resemblance. Otherwise, why need she start? She was prepared to meet a Musgrave—ah!"—Sybil clenches her right fingers under the covering of her silken sling—"there is the clue—there was a false name! Good, I am progressing. Then the mention of Upper Wentworth, that must be followed; and, lastly, her fainting fit at sight of Gerald Musgrave's picture. It is a perfect play! I would not have missed

this for worlds, even if I had not been so closely connected with it. How wonderful it all is! I can scarcely believe my luck. I would give a good deal for Gerald Musgrave to walk in here to-night. I wonder if I should be very much out in my calculations? I don't think so. I have served an apprenticeship at these sort of things." Her beautiful face grows hard as she muses this, and then a smile breaks on her lips; "And therefore, when I read the signs so easily, I need not imagine I am very wrong in guessing that my Lady Ardean knows more of the missing Gerald Musgrave than she would care for us to know. How artful, how deep these childlike women are! I never gave her credit for so much knavery."

And while she is thinking this she is speaking in a soft, low voice to Niel, smiling now and then in a sweet, gentle fashion that makes Philip Brewer's blood boil.

"Good heavens! could anything be more unfortunate?" he thinks, despairingly, as he turns over Niel's strange manner to himself. "He evidently doubts me, and while these two devils of women are here I shall have no chance of righting myself. What is to be done? I can't go away and leave that poor child to face all this trouble."

Sybil retires early. She makes an excuse of fatigue, and with Lottie's aid goes to her room; and Niel, with a muttered apology, rises, and leaves Philip and Lord Grafford alone together.

He wants to be by himself, to think, to try and solve the hideous mystery, while upstairs Sadie lies on a couch in her dainty room, listening, hungering for him to come, yet dreading to meet him when she remembers that he lives in total ignorance of her cruel past. Poor child! she is almost beside herself with the events of the day.

Even yet, she has not realized that Jack Ronalds and Gerald Musgrave were one and the same man. She only knows that she has gazed on his pictured face, that in a dim, horrible way the old weary complications are returning to her, and that a new and more awful pain has pierced her heart to-night.

To have watched Niel and Sybil Warner to-night together would be more than she could stand; her eyes are haunted by the memory of that regally beautiful woman clinging to Niel—the man who once worshipped her, and whom now, perhaps—

Here Sadie covers her face with her hands, and a pang of remorse goes through her as she recalls Bee's strenuous endeavour to keep Sybil Warner out of the house.

"If—if I had taken Bee's advice all this would not have happened!" she moans, and then she tries to console herself, and to grow calm by the time Niel shall come.

The hours pass like lead to Sadie; each minute is an hour, and still he does not come.

At last, as her head is throbbing and her heart aching, she hears his step. He opens the door and enters the room.

She pushes herself into a sitting position, and looks wistfully at him, but jealousy, doubt, suspicion, are reigning in Niel's frank, loyal heart, and he makes no responsive smile.

"Are you not unwise?" he says, coldly and curtly. "You will be ill if you do not go to bed. Pray do so at once, or your maid may come in, and make some remark."

He crosses the room as he speaks, and opens the door that leads to his dressing-room; and without a glance or another word he goes in and turns the lock behind him.

Sadie sits and stares at the closed caken door. She has made no mistake; it is no cruel dream—Niel has left her for ever; gone is the brief, brief happiness, the sunshine of life has departed. Sadie reads in this action that something has come to alienate her husband from her; and in her distraught condition she is incapable of telling herself what it is, though her jealousy points to Sybil, and whispers that the old love is awakened, and that her reign is done.

She is not sensible of the mischief her faint-

ing fit has worked, poor child! Here is not the brain of a conspirator, and the sudden pang that was born when she saw Niel and Sybil together has almost obliterated the confusion and horror that came upon her as she beheld Jack's handsome, cruel pictured face. She sits till early dawn creeps into the sky; the fire has gone out; it is bitterly cold, but she does not move, only sits and looks at the door.

"He need not have locked it," she murmurs now and then. "I—I—understand. He is tired of me; he wants me no more. But I should not have gone!"

When the clock chimes seven she rises with difficulty, and gets into the large bed.

Her maid will come in an hour, and Sadie is wise enough to know, even if Niel had not pointed it out to her, that if Mary saw her in this plight she would be more than astonished. She must act her part for a little while until she sees how things go. The future lies black and dreary before her, and she weeps bitter tears as she rests there alone and desolate.

Philip has tried to write a cheerful letter to Bee, but it is a very difficult task. He has nothing but failure and mortification to confess, and he will not do this till all subterfuge is necessarily ended.

A week has gone since he came to Knarlesborough, and he must have been both a fool and blind if he had not read the resentment and suspicious doubt with which Lord Ardean regards him, the undisguised misery written on Sadie's lovely face, and the triumph that gleams in Sybil's eyes.

He knows nothing, of course, of what has taken place between Sadie and Niel since the night of her fainting fit, but he conjectures the worst, and he spends hours planning and thinking how he can aid them and overthrow Sybil Warner.

"Where is the man's sense?" he sometimes says angrily to himself of Niel. "He has been bitten once by this cat; why trust her again?"

But herein Philip shows a want of perspicuity; he literally is ignorant of the power such women as Sybil possess, or how delicately and ingeniously she is working her way now with the man whom she craves for, with such wild, unreasoning passion that must not desecrate the word love. No, he knows nothing of her wiles, her marvellous tact, but he is quick to see the deference, the friendship which Niel bestows on her, and the sight is almost as bitter to him as it is to poor Sadie.

To her the past week has been nothing short of torture. Niel has spoken to her only when courtesy and duty demanded it; he has left her on every possible occasion to sit beside Sybil; he has separated himself from her as though she were some dishonoured thing; but even this grief has not been so bad as her conversations with Sybil and Lottie.

No matter what theme is started, the subject always comes round to Gerald Musgrave and Upper Wentworth, and Sadie always leaves her guests with the painful knowledge that she has betrayed her anxiety, and put herself deeper in their power.

Now, more than ever, she deplores her weakness in having kept her secret from Niel—now, when the net seems closing around her, and he stands aloof from her as a total stranger.

Her only moments of ease are when she can speak with Philip, but though he longs to comfort her with all his heart, he sees that he must not permit her confidences.

Niel is always watching them, and Sybil never fails to make some pretty cutting remark when she finds them together. It is at the end of the week that Philip makes a sudden resolution.

"I will send for my darling. She need not come here direct, but be close by, so that Sadie can see her. I wish to Heaven something would happen to clear out this crew. Surely Ardean can see now what a sharp this illness is! Why, that doctor's face alone

convicts him. The whole thing has been a plant, a clever—unscrupulous plant—to ruin Sadie's happiness, and probably make a great lady of that woman Warner. It would not be wise to insist on Bee's coming here, but I shall be happier if I know she is in the neighbourhood."

Consequently he writes to Bee, and before the next day has grown into night a pretty little lady has taken up her abode in a farmhouse about a mile outside Knaresborough grounds.

"The people know me, and I can trust them," she writes to Philip. "You have not summoned me a day too soon. Heaven grant I may not be too late; I long to see Sadie, poor darling! Ah! she will not call me unjust and cruel now. I will make no move or sign till I hear from you, however, and no one will know I am here."

On receipt of this letter it is hardly necessary to say that Philip is more than overjoyed.

"If ever I have to go I shall not mind now so much," he said to himself, and then he puts on his rough shooting cap, and is about to go forth for a walk as far as the farmhouse aforementioned, when he sees Sybil Warner coming downstairs, clinging to Niel's strong arm.

She has met him on the landing, and with her sweet smile has pleaded her usual weakness with the usual result.

"Ah, Mr. Brewer!" she says. "Going out! You lucky man, how I envy you!"

"It is not very cold. Do you think it would harm you if you wrapped up warmly and came for a short drive?" Niel suggests, kindly.

Sybil shakes her head.

"I don't think I dare. Dr. Douglas would never forgive me if I did such a thing without his orders."

Philip shrugs his shoulders.

"It seems to me that you don't get on as well as you should, Miss Warner. Why not try some further advice? There is another excellent medical man in the village; is there not, Lord Ardean?"

"Yes, old Lithgow, a first-rate old chap. Do let me urge you to see him, Miss Warner. I hate to see you make such slow progress to recovery."

If a look can kill it is a marvel that Philip still stands, so murderous and full of hatred is the glance Sybil darts at him.

"Thanks!" she replies, languidly, though her blood is coursing wildly through her veins; "it is very, very kind of you, Lord Ardean, but I assure you I require no further advice. I could scarcely do so without hurting Dr. Douglas's feelings; and, believe me, I know I want nothing but time. It is only a question of nerves—prostration of the nervous system, and I—I am not very strong."

Those last few words have their desired effect on Niel. To Philip they are like gunpowder. With a doggedness that is new to him he pursues the theme.

"I seem to know Douglas's face so well; can't think where I have seen him before. Which is his hospital? Do you remember, Miss Warner?"

"I really can't say that I do, but as you seem eager to know I will ask him to-day when he comes."

Sybil has wreathed her lips into a smile, but under the silken sling she has clenched her right hand, and longs to strike it across Philip's face.

"He is here on a visit, I believe; is he not?" Mr. Brewer goes on, aggravatingly.

"Yes, to some old friends—the Brays. Do you know them?"

Sybil lets her gaze meet his direct. She is very bold, but Philip sees that this cross examination is angering her past all description.

"No," he answers, sauntering across the hall beside her. "I have not that pleasure—where does Dr. Douglas practice generally, Miss Warner? Your perfect belief and trust in him inspires me with like confidence."

It is always pleasant to know of a doctor one can rely on, and illness comes to all of us some day. Will you give me his address?"

Philip takes out a note-book and pencil, when Sybil gives a little cry.

"My arm!" she says, faintly; "I—I knocked it against the door."

"Are you sure it is not hurt?" Niel asks, eagerly.

She tries to smile, and then, as they enter the room, she sinks on a low chair.

"Please leave me. I shall be better in a moment, Lord Ardean!"

Niel obeys her, feeling a strange mixture of pity and yet contempt for her mingling in his breast. Outside he comes upon Philip, and, for the first time since he has been at the Castle Niel smiles at him, though, why the smile should come he does not know, save that there is a look in Philip's eyes that wake it.

"Are you so very eager to have a doctor, Brewer?" he asks.

Philip looks at him steadily.

"I wanted to see if my suspicions were correct, that was all."

"Suspensions!" Niel repeats, with a frown.

"Yes, of this illness. Can't you see, Ardean, how very strange the whole thing is? Surely, if Miss Warner be seriously injured, she cannot do better than have further advice."

The frown deepens on Niel's face, but it comes not altogether for Philip. These words are but a confirmation of the doubt that for the first time has sprung in his breast a moment ago.

"I don't like this Douglas!" Philip is continuing, when, unfortunately, Sadie interrupts him. She comes hurriedly, eagerly towards him.

"Oh, Mr. Brewer!" she says, in quick, low tones. "I have been looking for you everywhere. I—." Then she catches sight of her husband, and her words die away, checked as they have always done through this long, weary week.

Philip's heart sinks as he sees Niel's angry frown; and that the chance for bringing home some truths about Sybil Warner is gone from him again.

"Do you want me, Lady Ardean?" he asks, gently, as Niel with some muttered excuse turns on his heels, and walks rapidly away.

Sadie is gazing after her husband with eyes that are almost blinded by tears. "How cruel, how changed he is to her!" she thinks. And then comes the pang of self-reproach; "but have I not been wicked towards him? When—when he knows all, will he not hate and loathe me?"

She does not reply to Philip at first, then she looks at him sorrowfully.

"I did want you, but—I have forgotten what it was now, Mr. Brewer."

Philip feels a throb of deepest pity for her. Poor child, he sees that she is nearly distraught with one thing and another; but he has no idea of how much suffering she has endured this last week.

"If only Bee were here!" he hears her whisper, and his heart leaps with gladness.

"Come out with me for a stroll!" he says, eagerly. "It is not very cold to-day, and we can have a brisk walk and chat."

"I should like it, but I have not been with Miss Warner once to-day yet," falters Sadie.

Philip checks the exclamation that rises to his lips, coupled with Sybil's name.

"Your health is of far more importance than anyone else's here," he answers, promptly. "I know Mrs. Dalrymple would insist on looking after you; and since she is not here I shall take her place."

Sadie's cheeks are stained with tears, that roll, large and bitter, down the sweet, pale face.

"Oh, Bee! Bee!" she says, sadly, to herself, as the memory of the happy times that

existed, when Niel's sister was with them, comes to her mind. "How I miss you, dear, and yet—" She stops and gazes earnestly at Philip. "Yet I would not have her here now; I know she would break her heart!"

"You must be brave, dear!" Philip comforts her. "It is only a passing cloud. In a few days these people must go, and then—"

"Then!" Sadie draws near him. She has drawn near him, and is speaking in low, agitated tones. "Then—what will happen? Mr. Brewer, I am getting frightened. I—Oh! let me come out with you; I feel I must tell you all, or I shall go mad!"

She is trembling from head to foot, and there is a look of intense mental agony on her face.

"Wait for me, I shall only be one minute," she adds; and she goes swiftly up the broad stairs to fetch her hat and warm cloak.

Philip stands gazing after, ignorant that Sybil from behind the half-closed drawing-room door is watching him.

"Poor child!" he murmurs. "I shall advise her to be frank with Ardean, and tell all. It is late, but, please Heaven, not too late. What is it she fears, I wonder?"

Sybil watches her girl hostess come quickly across the hall. She sees the anxious air with which Philip escorts her out-of-doors, and her heart leaps with malicious delight.

"They are playing still deeper into my hands; what fools they are. And yet," her brow darkens, "that Brewer is not altogether a fool. I hate him, he is dangerous; there was no mistaking his manner, just now, when he spoke of Douglas. He half-impressed Niel too. I saw that at once. Well, Mr. Brewer, you shall pay for this in double measure, or my name is not Sybil Warner!"

She sits, and is musing thus when the door opens, and Niel enters.

"Are you better?" he asks, gently. "hope you did not hurt your arm?" then he casts a hurried glance round the room. "I—I thought my wife was here," he finishes.

"No, I am quite alone." Sybil's face wears a plaintive though resigned air. "Lady Ardean is so good; it is not right she should sit indoors with me all day. I saw her pass through the grounds just now with Mr. Brewer; they were evidently discussing state secrets, they looked so grave," Sybil laughs faintly; "but I suppose as very old friends they have lots to talk about. Won't you sit down, Lord Ardean? You look really quite tired."

There is, indeed, a gray shade on Niel's face; the youth and comeliness that came with his great love and happiness have both vanished. He is now a worn, grave man, prematurely aged.

"Have you known much of this man Brewer?" he asks suddenly, ignoring her pretty gesture towards a chair, and standing rigid and upright with his back to the fire. Sybil does not answer at once.

"I have heard a great deal about him," she says, with a gentle hesitation that is more damning than any words could be. "He—I mean, Lord Ardean, that," with a splendid assumption of pain and diffidence, "that Mr. Brewer is scarcely admitted as a friend in the circle in which I move. I confess," she adds, after a moment's pause, in which she watches Niel most narrowly, "that I was considerably surprised when I found him a guest beneath your roof; but when I perceived how warmly Lady Ardean welcomed him, and how much she valued his friendship, I, of course, altered my opinion, as she would never own him as a friend if he were not all he should be!"

How sweetly she launches the shaft that he knows strikes home. Niel comprehends his lips, and clenches one hand. How he regrets he did not inquire into Philip's intimacy with Sadie! He is in a state of mind that is not easily described, loving her with a mad despairing love that is lashed into a passion by his deepening jealousy, tormented by

doubts that rise on all sides by the sweetly uttered poison that works so insidiously and so well; angry with himself for having permitted Sybil Warner to rest beneath his roof, then full of self-reproach for permitting such an ungenerous thought towards the woman who saved his darling's life. He is in no condition to bear further trouble with patience, and this is not lost on Sybil.

"If even I never learn her secret," she thinks to herself, triumphantly, "I hold a trump card. Niel is growing mad with jealousy against this Brewer! It must be fostered, and that will not be difficult, seeing they give me so much help themselves."

Then she talks on in her low, soft voice, implanting a sting now and then which lives all too surely in Niel's heart, and yet she is so careful, so full of tact and apparent love for Sadie, that he sees nothing of her malice; and when he leaves her presence it was the bitter knowledge that she has proved herself a pure, tender-hearted woman; while Sadie, the girl he worshipped as something higher than the angels, is gradually emerging from beneath the veil of beauty and innocence in which he has wrapped her, and is showing herself a deceitful, worldly, even perhaps a dishonoured and dishonouring creature.

And out in the chill, dreary grounds that surround her magnificent home, Sadie is standing, facing Philip Brewer, her eyes large and luminous through her tears; her lips as white as her cheeks.

"Tell me, it is not true—?" she is saying over and over again.

"I know it to be false," Philip answers, firmly. "I myself made every inquiry. Jack Ronalds is dead as surely as we one day, too, shall die. For Heaven's sake don't get this notion into your head."

"But—" Sadie pushes back the clusters of dark curls from her brow with a feverish action. "But they—they say differently. They tell me that—his mother has found a clue that he is still alive, and will soon be with them again. Think—think how awful this is to me! Think what I have done; what I am! It—it only came to me last night, suddenly. How horrible it all was! how I have sinned. I am deceiving him, my love; my one precious love! I have linked myself to the one man whom my poor father held in such detestation and horror; those two things of themselves are enough; but now comes this more terrible calamity—a calamity that will not fall on me alone, but on him. He is so proud, so noble. His name has never known dishonour nor shame, and it is left for me to bring all this upon it. Oh! I cannot bear it. I shall go mad; or I shall die."

And Sadie flings herself face downwards on the damp, cold, earth, weeping a bitter paroxysm of tears.

Philip bends over her, and with tender, yet strong arms, lifts her to her feet again. He makes her sit down on a knarled old tree and rest, without speaking for awhile; then he begins to comfort her as best he can.

"You are troubling yourself over this most needlessly, dear," he says, gently. "Can you not be satisfied that the man who treated you so cruelly, so wickedly, is lying in his grave?"

"But are you sure? Have you certain proofs? May there not have been some mistake?"

No, none," Philip replies, firmly, though his heart grows suddenly cold. What if it should have been only a ruse on Jack's part to escape the chance of being captured? What if the body that was found on the river brink should have been another man and poor Robert Cuthbert's murderer were even now wandering about loose?

A cold sweat breaks out on his brow; he has never doubted Jack's death before, but something in Sadie's agony of fear creeps into his mind and chills his heart. Nevertheless, he will not let her see this, but by every means in his power soothes her till he has wooed her

back to something like composure of confidence.

Before they start to walk back to the house Philip makes one suggestion.

"Ardean must know the story without any further delay; there has been enough mischief done already. As you are so weak and ill, poor child! will you let me take this off your shoulders. It will be a painful task, but I will gladly do anything for you, and you know it?"

Sadie bends her head and kisses his hand. "How good, how kind you are!" she says, with trembling lips; "but I cannot let you do this. I have sinned, and I must expiate my sin. I will tell everything to Niel before I go to rest to-night."

Little does Sadie know what will happen before this night shall come.

She parts from Philip with a sensation of comfort and relief; though her sorrow, her anticipation of misery is great; yet his frank, kindly friendship has done her good, and she feels she can undertake her confession with more strength and hope than an hour ago had seemed possible.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Sadie's first action on entering the house is to make her way up to her own room. Once there, and safely locked in, she falls on her knees, and prays Heaven to give her help in this moment of deepest misery. She prays, too, that Niel may not suffer too much, and that his heart may not be turned against her; and when she rises from her knees she feels that her prayers will not be altogether in vain.

Strong in this feeling, and eager to have the worst over at once, she goes downstairs to find Niel.

On the stairs she meets his valet, and asks for him, but before he can answer Lottie Musgrave replies—she is just passing along the corridor in her outdoor attire.

"Lord Ardean has gone out for the afternoon, I fancy, Lady Ardean," she says. "I saw him start, and I think I heard him say he might not be home to dinner."

Sadie's heart sinks.

"Did the Earl leave any message?" she asks, turning to the servant.

"He desired me to tell your ladyship that he had been summoned on important business to Galtown, and that he feared he could not return in time for dinner."

Sadie dismisses him with a gesture; she restrains her face, but she is bitterly disappointed, and tears are springing unbidden to her eyes.

"Perhaps Sybil can tell you more about this ride, Lady Ardean," Lottie observes, innocently, yet marking how pale the girl grows, "as I fancy your husband saw her before he started."

"I think I can wait till Niel comes home. I am not impatient or curious," is Sadie's reply, given with a very faint smile.

It is so hard to bear! Just when she has called up all her courage and strength to meet Niel, and now he is not here, and she will have to wait through three or four long dreary hours before she can see him.

Lottie notices the increased pallor and the look of pain in the sweet eyes, and imagines that it is because she has brought in that remark about Sybil, so she goes on in the same strain.

"I don't quite know, but I believe Lord Ardean has gone to execute some commission for Sybil. Shall we go down and ask her?"

But Sadie shrinks back.

"No, no!" she says hurriedly, and with some dignity. "There is no occasion to have any cross-examination, Miss Musgrave, as to what reason has taken my husband out. Such a trifle is really not worthy of remark."

Lottie feels she is rebuked, and she gets angry accordingly, but she finds nothing to say pleasant or unpleasant; and so they pass

down the stairs together, and on into the drawing-room.

If Sadie could choose her own pleasure she would not approach either of her guests this afternoon. She has grown to dread the sound of Sybil's sweet-cruel voice. She feels utterly powerless to compete with this woman, whom she knows now is her enemy and her rival.

But Sadie is no coward in cases like these. As yet Miss Warner is still her supposed friend; at any rate, she is her guest, and, therefore, she will not let her be neglected, or permit her to see for an instant that she is recognized at her true worth. Her heart is very heavy and sad as she enters the drawing-room, and a presentiment that more troubles are at hand hangs vaguely upon her.

Sybil is looking more than ordinarily beautiful. There is a flush on her face that enhances her great loveliness beyond description. Sadie catches a glimpse of her own sad sweet image, and she cannot but see how pale and puny it is beside this gorgeous woman.

"You look quite worn and weary!" cries Sybil lightly, as the girl draws near. "I do hope you are not going to take my place and be invalid? Mr. Brewer should be scolded for taking you such long walks. They are too much for you."

"We did not walk far!" Sadie answers quietly.

"Oh! I thought you had gone miles! So did Lord Ardean. You were out such a long time."

Sadie flinches, though her pure heart has not grasped the full malignant meaning of these words. She is spared as yet the knowledge that Niel doubts her love, and thinks of her as false, and with Philip Brewer she looks pale and grave as she draws a chair to the fire, and takes up some work.

Sybil longs to seize her, and shake her violently. Sadie's coldness—her marvellous dignity—are hateful to her. She feels that this girl is as far above her as the sun is above the earth; and though she may fret and worry her—though she may eventually ruin her happiness and break her heart—she will ever remain above her as pure and morally beautiful as the stars of heaven. Sadie's silence irritates her, especially in her excited mood, for she has suddenly arrived at the conclusion that it is time she commenced her work of destruction, and to that end she has manoeuvred to get Niel out of the way for the next few hours while she begins her wicked operations.

"What are you waiting for, Lottie!" she asks impatiently, as she sees Miss Musgrave still standing by the window.

"For Lord Grafford!" is the prompt reply. "Ah! here he is."

"I met the post-boy coming up the avenue, and took the letters from him, Lady Ardean," the young fellow says, as he comes into the room. "There is such a budget! I see my mother has written to you."

Lottie bites her lip suddenly. She is not making such good progress as she had hoped, and the very mention of Lady Grafford's name is to her appalling.

"I hope it is to say that she is coming to stay with us," Sadie says as lightly and as pleasantly as she can; she tries so hard to keep her aching, miserable heart hidden from the cruel piercing eyes of these two women.

Lord Grafford grows fiery red; he scarcely knows whether he wants his mother to come or not. He is an affectionate son; but she has a very strange antipathy to Miss Musgrave. Now Miss Musgrave amuses him and takes his thoughts away from Sadie, or he would do nothing but sit and dream about her all day.

He hands the letters to their respective owners. There are several for Sybil, a packet for Sadie, and one for Lottie Musgrave, who grows a shade paler, and withdrawing into a window niche opens it hurriedly.

The others are deep in their correspondence, when a smothered cry breaks from Lottie's lips; she stands like a figure turned to stone,



[SADIE GIVES A SMOTHERED CRY, AND, STAGGERING BACK, SEEMS ABOUT TO FALL.]

and then without looking to right or left she goes rapidly from the room.

"Oh! I am afraid something has happened, I must go to her," Sybil cries, feeling that the letter has contained very powerful news indeed to upset Lottie's cold, calculating nature so easily. She rises at once, and Sadie of course does the same; but Miss Warner is not anxious to have a third person present at her interview with her friend and confederate.

"No—no, please don't trouble, Lady Ardean," she says hurriedly. "I understand, Lottie, and I will come back immediately and tell you how she is."

And with that she turns and runs from the room, utterly forgetting her languid invalid movements in her anxiety to know what has happened. Sadie cannot fail to remark on this strange energy in one who every day complains of excessive weakness and debility, but she is much too generous-minded to give it its true significance; and attributes it to Sybil's anxiety over her friend.

Lord Grafford is standing looking very awkward and uncomfortable as they are left alone, and Sadie gives him one faint smile.

"I am sure you would like to have a good brisk walk," she says, understanding his shyness quite easily; "and I don't suppose Miss Musgrave will expect you to wait for her—at any rate, I will explain if you would prefer going."

Lord Grafford seizes the opportunity eagerly, and strides away; and Sadie, looking after him, gives a little sigh.

"I am glad his mother is coming," she thinks to herself, "for many reasons." And then she falls thinking and longing for Niel to return.

"Will he forgive me," she asks herself with a shudder; "or will he spurn me from him as an outcast or sinner? Oh! if I had only been stronger—if I had only told him, how different it would have been! I could have borne all the cruel hints at the past. I could even have

faced that more awful trouble—the thought that Jack was not dead. Thank Heaven, I need not let that come, to torment me." Mr. Brewer would not let me live on in ignorance if he thought there was a shred of truth in the matter. No—no; he is brave and staunch, and he would never have let me drift into my happiness unless he had had sure, certain proofs that that wretched man was dead."

She crouches down by the fire, and gazes earnestly into the blazing coals.

"No, no; that horrible fear is over, and nothing remains but my confession to Niel. Oh! my darling; Heaven grant you will forgive me. What shall I do if you will not? What will become of me? What would my life be like without you? This—this week has been torture, has nearly killed me, and yet I have seen you. I have heard you speak. I have sometimes touched your hand. Then, what would it be like if weeks after weeks went by, and I had not even one of these small consolations—only the bitter, the hideous knowledge that you hated me, that you looked on me as a dishonest, dishonourable woman; perhaps that you had forgotten me."

She gives a little cry of pain, and hides her face in her hands, suddenly.

"I could never endure it," she whispers to herself. "I would die first."

She sits long like this. She has forgotten all about her guests, of Lottie's distress, and Sybil's energy. She is lost in her own troubled thoughts, wearily longing for the hours to pass, and the dread confession to be over.

Suddenly the door opens and someone comes in. Sadie wakes from her reflections with a start. It is Sybil Warner; she sweeps up to the fire in her usual languid manner, but there is an air of excitement, of nervousness, about her that at once conveys itself to Sadie.

"I hope you will forgive us for leaving you so long, Lady Ardean," she says, slowly, and speaking very deliberately; "but something

very wonderful has happened, and we were so lost in talking about it that we forgot how time was flying."

Sadie unconsciously grows paler—why, she could not explain if she were asked.

"I—I hope," she says, nervously, "that Miss Musgrave has not had bad news?"

Sybil pauses a moment, very deliberately, then she answers the question.

"No; she has had good news; very, very good news."

Sadie's heart stands still, and her hands grow cold as death. She rises, mechanically, to her feet; and Sybil, watching as a cat does a mouse, sees with exultation how each carefully delivered sentence is going home.

"Lottie has heard from her mother by this post, Lady Ardean. I am sure your sympathetic heart will rejoice when you hear that at last they have discovered traces of the lost Gerald Musgrave; that their search is at an end now for ever; that Gerald Musgrave is alive and close at hand!"

At her last words Sadie gives a smothered cry, and, staggering back, seems about to fall, but Sybil stretches out her strong hand and so holds her while she gazes on the white stricken face with so cruel, so triumphantly malignant an expression that it is well Sadie's eyes are closed, and she is spared this additional pain.

(To be continued.)

ANY good photographer can easily become an expert sketcher in pen and ink. Let him make a silver print from his negative, go over the outlines of the objects on it with ink, shade them, pour a solution over the print, and lo! the photograph is eaten away, and the pen-and-ink sketch left in its stead. Thus very artistic results may be produced by a simple chemical process.



[PRESENTED AT COURT.]

NOVELLETTE.]

BRANDON BEECHES

:—:

CHAPTER I.

A CAT'S-EYE RING.

No one knew why "Beeches." There was nothing in the shape of a beech-tree anywhere near it. The name had a supremely English flavour about it, and was suggestive of stately woods and shady avenues, and old parks with deer feeding on the turf, and all the breezy sights and sounds that go to make the beauty of an English home.

An Australian sun of the fiercest was pouring down its radiance on the little dwelling with the suggestive name, and the birds and flowers of another world, as it were, flitted and blossomed for its owners—birds of brilliant plumage and flowers of stately growth and delicate colours; but there were many times in their lives when Malcolm Thurston and his gentle wife would have given a year of their lives to look once more on an English landscape and inhale the fragrance of English woods and hedges in the summer.

They had emigrated many a long year ago, as poor as two people could well be who had taken their lives into their own hands and were prepared to do the best they could with them. They had married in opposition to the wishes of their friends; that is, Malcolm Thurston, who had been what his relations called wild, had crowned his folly by marrying a penniless girl and making her the sharer of his luckless life, instead of breaking faith with her and deserting her as his lordly relatives would have had him do.

She was an orphan, and had no regrets in leaving England; she had faith in her husband, and they were together. What more could any one want as long as they had health and strength?

They had had a hard life of it at the Antipodes, in the twenty years that had gone over their heads, but they had managed to live and keep a refined and pleasant home since their daughter, the only one left of all their children, had grown up.

Their house had come to be a pretty place with the years that had flitted by since they found themselves the possessors of a great, barren-looking stretch of land, with a wooden hut upon it, only fit for a shepherd to shelter from the storms in.

The hut had long since vanished and a good house taken its place, and the land was cultivated and fenced and looked after in a fashion that made the farm a sort of celebrated place for good management, and profit too. On the whole, Malcolm Thurston had been a lucky man.

We say "had been," for the last year before our tale begins had been a complete reversion of the good fortune that had hitherto been his portion, and for the past two weeks the dread of losing his home and seeing his wife and child obliged to turn out into the world, had weighed him down like a nightmare.

Mrs. Thurston and her daughter knew of the impending calamity—there were no secrets at the Beeches—at it was with very heavy hearts that they saw Mr. Thurston start for Sydney one bright summer morning to try a last resource—a lawyer in that city, from whom he hoped—only hoped, to get some assistance.

Only one other person knew of the strait he was in besides his own family, and that was a young man named Paul Clintock, who was associated with Mr. Thurston in the management of the farm. He had come to the colony to see what he could do with himself, and chance had thrown him into the way of the owner of the Beeches, who at that time wanted just such a hand about his place.

The arrangement had answered very well; the young man had shown himself sensible

and shrewd, and strong and capable withal, and everything had gone smoothly.

Paul Clintock did not live in the house of his employer, he boarded at the nearest neighbour's, a mile or so away, but he was perfectly at ease at the Beeches, and as much at home in the house as if he lived there. Somehow, though he was very useful, none of the family liked him personally.

Mildred Thurston, the pretty daughter of the house, the darling of her parents, and, indeed of everyone who knew her, had a positive antipathy to the handsome Paul Clintock. It was a case of "Dr. Fell," she told her parents; she could not tell why she did not like him, but she did not—his eyes were too close together, and his lips were too thin.

She could assign no real reason for her antipathy—the young man was always scrupulously polite to her, and gentlemanly and refined in his manners. He seldom spoke of any relations, but they understood that he had run through what little money he had in England, and had come out, as Mr. Thurston had done twenty years before, penniless.

It so happened that Paul Clintock was also away while Mr. Thurston went to Sydney on his disagreeable errand, and both Mildred and her mother felt relieved by his absence. He knew of the straits the family were in, and sympathised with the misfortune he was powerless to avert; but they could better bear the suspense with no eyes but their own to witness their trouble, and they were very thankful that business of his own had taken Mr. Clintock away.

He did occasionally make a journey on his own account. He had some friends north of the little settlement where they lived, and some even as far away as Brisbane. It was to Brisbane he was gone now, and his absence would extend to a week altogether.

There were two days of the week still left when Mildred went down the road that led to the station—a tiny station had arisen within

walking distance in the past year, with two trains a day stopping at it, and the family at Brandon Beeches felt themselves quite within reach of the great world in consequence.

A sweet rosebud of a girl was Mildred Thurston—a bonnie English lass, though she had never seen her parents' native land, and to all appearances was never likely to do so. She loved the unknown country as passionately as her mother did, and was never tired of hearing how things were done in England, and how English people looked and spoke. She knew London by heart from constant study of the best maps and much teaching, and many a dweller in the great city might have learned its topography from the fair-haired Australian girl.

Very charming she looked in her white dress and hat as she stood before her mother and bade her be of good cheer.

"I am going to the station, mamma dear," she said. "And I am going to bring back papa and the good luck as well."

"I am afraid not the luck, dear. I think it was a hopeless journey. I wish he had not gone!"

"I don't, mamma. I believe he will bring back good news. We are to be lucky this year, you know—old Chickamaroo said so."

Chickamaroo was an old native woman whose name no one could quite guess—the extraordinary appellation to which she had come to answer as if it belonged to her being the nearest approach to it that any Saxon mouth could accomplish.

"Didn't she bless the house and everything in it, and call upon her special gods to pour out all the good things of this world on our heads when papa helped her out of the hole that night? It is coming true. I have never had so many chickens as I have this year; and the garden has never done better; and a black cat walked into the kitchen this very morning—a creature that must have dropped from the moon I verily believe—and she has taken up her quarters in Snap's old basket, and means to stay there! What ill-luck can come to us after such wonders happening?"

"Ah, my dear, I am afraid Chickamaroo's blessing, like her tumble, came of drink. And as for the black cat—where cream is cats will come. I don't want to damp your hopes, my darling, but I cannot share it! I cannot share it!"

"Now, mamma darling, you are not to cry and talk like that; you have just been fretting yourself ill."

And Mildred put her soft arms round her mother's neck, and made her look up and smile back at her. It was a faded, worn-looking face that she kissed so lovingly; pretty and placid it would always be, but the cares of twenty years had left their impress on it, and it was touched here and there with the lines that tell their own story. The hair that lay softly and smoothly on the fair forehead was almost white, and yet Mrs. Thurston was not much past forty. "The lady" everybody that saw her called her instinctively, and a true lady she was in every sense of the word.

She dried the tears that lay on her cheeks, and kissed her daughter as she stooped over her; and then, as the slight form disappeared round the corner of the house, she bent her head again and wept passionate tears over the ruin that she believed could not be averted. She loved her home and all in it with a clinging affection. She had watched it grow from the tiny beginning that two well-nigh penniless people were able to make into a comfortable, almost luxurious place, and it was very dear to her.

It was as dear to Mildred, whose heart was aching with a sick dread as she walked along in spite of her brave words, to her mother. She dreaded seeing the train come in and hearing her father's voice. It would have no good tidings for her, she felt sure of that. She could see the train a long time before it stopped, and oh! how slowly it seemed to

come along. It crawled like a long snake across the side of the hill, and she had worked herself almost into a fever by the time it steamed into the station.

She sprang to her father's side as he left the carriage, and looked eagerly into his face. It was pale and tired-looking, and certainly there was not a trace of gladness in it as he stooped to kiss her and return her greeting. Silently, and not daring to ask him a question, she walked by his side out of the station; and it was not till they were well out of hearing of the men about the place that she ventured to address him.

"Papa," she said, softly.

"My dear?"

There was no ring in the voice; it was like his looks, weary and trouble-laden, and her heart sank.

"Is it—have you?—I mean can anything be done?"

"About the money? Oh, yes, my dear, that is all settled."

"Settled, papa! Did you get it?"

"Yes, dear."

"And we shall not have to give up the Beeches?"

"No, child; our home is safe. Don't look at me with such very wide open eyes. It is all right, and there will be no trouble about the money. It is mine on very easy terms."

"I am so glad—so glad!"

And to prove how glad she was, Mildred burst into tears and cried as if her heart would break.

"My dear, there is nothing to cry about," Mr. Thurston said, putting his arm round her. "We are saved from a terrible misfortune, and it is not likely to threaten us again, that is all."

He was not like himself. The old hearty ring seemed to have gone out of his voice, and there was no gladness in his face as he looked at her and bade her dry her eyes, or her mother would be frightened.

Mrs. Thurston was too much agitated and overcome to notice that her husband was unlike himself. Their home was safe, and she could realize nothing else for the moment. Presently she, too, noticed her husband's preoccupied manner and grave face.

"Darling! it is nothing," he said, gently. "only reaction. No one but myself can tell what I have gone through during the last few days. I thought I had ruined you, dear one, and lost our home."

"And it is quite safe now, Malcolm?"

"Quite, little wife! And what is more, it is as good as free of debt. I got the money on marvellously easy terms."

"On what terms, dear? It was borrowed, of course?"

"Yes, but my creditor will not press me. You shall know all to-morrow; I am tired, and feel as if everything was unreal to-night."

"So the help is not unreal nothing else signifies," Mrs. Thurston said, and he took out his pocket-book and showed her the money—crisp bank-notes and shining gold—and thankful tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks as she kissed him with heartfelt sympathy.

Mildred was satisfied to know that her father had obtained the money somehow, and was not to be pressed for immediate payment. She asked no more questions about the business, but went about the house singing like a bird in the very lightness and thankfulness of her heart.

The next day brought Paul Clintock back again. He was all congratulations and smiles, but to Mildred there seemed a false ring in his heartiness and a curious look in his eyes as he watched her father's face.

"You are very fortunate, Mr. Thurston," he said, as they sat all together after breakfast, talking and waiting for the post hour.

"I am."

"Such a large sum of money is not often procured so easily."

"It is not—it was obtained under exceptional circumstances."

He did not say what circumstances, and the young man could not ask any questions; but he would have given a good deal just then to know how the sum was obtained, and from whom. He was rather disappointed that it had been procured so easily; he meant to marry Mildred some day in spite of her unconcealed dislike, and Mr. Thurston, poor and hampered by difficulties that he could not surmount, would have been much more easy to deal with than Mr. Thurston prosperous and easy in mind and pocket.

Paul Clintock loved himself better than anything on the face of the earth, but he loved Mildred Thurston next best, and he had made up his mind that she should be his wife. How the event was going to be brought about he did not quite know; he had tried making love to the young lady, and had been repulsed with such indignant scorn that he had not had a word to say for himself afterwards. But he had left her presence thoroughly resolved to gain his end somehow, and to revenge himself on her afterwards. He loved her passionately; but when she was his—and she should be—he would make her feel that he was master. Mildred thought no more about it; she had said "No," and there was an end of it as far as she was concerned.

The mail came by-and-by, letters and papers, the Sydney dailies full of a great robbery that had been cleverly perpetrated at the place of business of one of the richest merchants in the place. A large quantity of notes had been abstracted, and the thief had been clever enough to get rid of them in various places in an incredibly short space of time. Money was not all that had been taken. In the safe that had been forced was some jewellery belonging to a client of the gentleman whose office had been visited. One article was especially noticeable—a ring of great antiquity and rarity, a large cat's eye stone set round with coloured gems, and having a Sarcenic inscription at the back of the setting. One of the missing notes, too, had a curious endorsement—"Ursula Gretel, Wife of Hans," the worthy lady evidently having been under the impression that it was necessary to be explicit.

The note was a very old one, and it was hardly hoped that it would still be in existence, but its description was given in the hope that it might possibly be traced.

"An odd affair!" Paul Clintock said, laying down his paper.

"Very," Mr. Thurston said, indifferently. His thoughts were roaming far away, sent flying by the letter he had been reading.

He rose abruptly and went to his own room, and they heard him shut his door with a snap.

"I hope he has no bad news," his wife said, anxiously. "Letters always seem to make me nervous now."

There was no bad news. The letters were all good, he told Mildred when she asked him; but he was oddly preoccupied and silent. It was very nice to have the freedom of home restored, and to feel that it was their very own again; and the lazy days, as Mildred called them, slipped by till a week had passed since her father's coming and the news of that Sydney robbery. No clue had been obtained to the guilty parties; the police seemed completely at fault, but their efforts and failures did not much affect the quiet lives of the inmates of Brandon Beeches.

Mildred was sitting by herself in her father's room, he had taken his wife on a visit to a neighbour about a mile distant, and they would be away some hours. She was singing merrily over some sewing when Paul Clintock put his head in at the door.

"Is Mr. Thurston back?" he asked.

"No; he said about seven I might expect him."

"Oh dear!" the young man said, in a disappointed tone. "How very unlucky! Graham's people from the Belt farm have

sent for those papers about the sheep—you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes."

"I think they mean buying if they could get them at once, and if I had those estimates about the food and so forth that your father drew up, I could clinch the bargain at once. It is a pity, for I know he is anxious to get them sold."

"I know he is," Mildred said. "If he has only not taken his keys I can get them for you. I know they are in his desk."

She left the room as she spoke, and the young man looked after her with a smile that would have been an ugly one if he had been sure no eyes could see him; as it was, it was slightly cynical.

"You are very lovely this morning, my wife that is to be!" he said to himself. "My wife that shall be in spite of the fates!"

Mildred came back in a very short time with the keys in her hand.

"I found them in papa's pocket," she said.

"Isn't it lucky?"

"Very," Paul Clintock replied. "Will you get me the paper, please, Miss Thurston? I am in a hurry."

"I think it was in this little drawer," Mildred said, pulling open an inside place. Paul had come up quite close to her so that he could see all that was in the desk as well as herself. It was not a secret place. Mr. Thurston kept all his business matters there, and the young man had sat at it for his own part of the writing many a time.

There were some papers in the little drawer that Mildred opened, and there was something else—a crumpled-up bit of paper and something hard wrapped up in it, which slipped from her fingers and rolled to the floor, sending out great flashes of light in the sun-shine as it spun about before it finally settled down under the table.

In a moment Paul had picked it up, and the two were looking at each other with blanched faces and quivering lips, utterly unable to frame a single word.

The cat's-eye ring, with the setting of gems and the Sarcenic inscription at the back, was glittering in the hand of Paul Clintock, and Mildred's trembling fingers held the old bank-note inscribed with the name of "Ursula Gretel, wife of Hans!"

CHAPTER II.

THE PRICE OF A SERVICE.

MILDRED was the first to speak.

"Give that to me!" she said, in a sharp, hard tone, "it is papa's. You should not have come looking over my shoulder like that."

"I had no idea the desk held any secrets, or I would not have done so!" Paul Clintock replied, still holding the ring, and looking at it with a fazed expression in his face. "How came it here?"

"What?"

"This ring, and that bank note in your hand. You know them as well as I do! They have been inquired for all over Australia—it is a little odd that you and I should find them!"

"Papa knows—he will explain!" Mildred said, her breath coming in gasps, and her whole frame trembling. She was beginning to realize what the finding of these two articles must mean.

"Give it me back!" she said, passionately. "I had no business to come here—you had no business to ask me to do it! Oh, if papa would only come home!"

"It is just as well he should not come home and see these things in our hands," the young man said, quietly. "Don't look so frightened, Mildred, my darling! Ah! forgive me, I did not mean to let the word slip out; but you know what I feel—what I shall feel to my dying day for you! you will always be my darling, treat me as you will. I will not talk of that now, only of what we have discovered."

Ah! why did he not destroy them or dispose of them somewhere safely? We need never have known anything about it then!"

He spoke half to himself, looking gravely at the ring he held, and Mildred stared blankly at him, the whole meaning of the discovery beginning to break in upon her.

The money which her father had procured from somewhere—neither she nor her mother knew where—his evident low spirits and pre-occupation when he came back from that journey to Sydney, and a certain nervousness that seemed to have been upon him ever since, all came before her with horrible suggestiveness, and seemed to chill her to the heart.

Oh! if she had only let the desk alone and never opened it, or if she alone had seen what was hidden there! Half of the horror of the dreadful discovery would have been taken away if it had been hers alone, but Paul Clintock had seen what she found!

Paul, who was poor, and to whom the big reward that was offered would be an object! What would he do? Would he denounce her father as a—Bah! the idea was ridiculous! Her loved and honoured father, to whom the thought of dishonour was as impossible as to an innocent child to whom the meaning of the word was unknown! He would explain—he would tell him how she had come to go to his desk, and he would tell her how the ring and the bank-note came to be there.

She turned to Paul Clintock and held out her hand for the ring.

"Give it to me, please," she said. "I will put it back till papa comes home; he will tell us what he is going to do with them. He has found them, of course."

"Of course," Paul replied, in a curious tone. "Mr. Thurston will know very well what to do with these little articles. I wonder that a man of his sense and clearheadedness ventured to leave them where even his daughter could see them."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. That you and I hold your father's good name and his safety in our hands. It is for us to decide what we shall do with the trust."

"Do! You will not betray him?"

"That is an ugly word to use, Mildred. I will keep the secret on a condition!"

"What is it?"

"You can save your father from any consequences of what we have seen being discovered, if you will. His safety rests with you."

"How?"

"I will be silent on one condition. I will take any oath you like that not a breath of what we two have seen shall ever pass my lips if—"

He drew her close to him as he spoke and whispered the remainder of his words into her ear. She looked at him a moment in undisguised amazement and then recoiled, with fear and aversion in her eyes.

"No!" she gasped, in a faltering voice.

"No, I cannot!"

"Do not say 'no' too hastily," he said, quietly enough. "Think over what I have said; your father's liberty and honour are in your hands. If you say me nay—"

"Well," she said, sharply—she could not command her voice to speak calmly—"if I do?"

"Then I go to Sydney with this ring in my hand and ask the police there for the reward they are offering. It is a large one."

"Yes, I know," she said, with a gasp. "Mr. Clintock—Paul, have mercy! What have I ever done to you that you should ask such a price at my hand for one little favour?"

"Little! You have curious notions of the value of things, Miss Thurston. Most daughters would think nothing too much to give for the service I will render to you for that one little word 'yes!' The price is not a heavy one; what I should get from the Government would be of far more money value to me."

"Perhaps you would like the money better!"

she said, with a touch of scorn. "You had better go and earn it, Paul Clintock. It is some horrible lie; my father is as innocent of what you fancy as I am. It can be explained."

"Not easily, I fancy. There are ugly rumours afloat already about the money which he found just at the right time. I have only to speak, and all that is mysterious will be clear at once. It is for you to decide whether I shall speak or not."

"No, no!" she faltered, bursting into passionate tears now, her self-control a thing of the past. "I cannot—I will not!"

"Very well," he said, coldly, "You have chosen then."

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "Give me time; it is too horrible. I must have space to think and understand; it can all be explained. Papa will—"

"Will not thank his daughter for condemning him to the consequences of his crime. Ah! you wince at the word. It is a plain one, is it not? but it is the right one to use. Mr. Thurston in prison will have plenty of time to reflect on the humanity of his child, who might have saved him and would not."

"Oh! you are cruel, cruel!" Mildred said, passionately. "Give me till to-morrow."

"A good smith always strikes while the iron is hottest," Paul Clintock said. "I will not wait till mine cools. I will give you five minutes, Mildred. Ah, it ought not to take you as long as that to decide. Come, think of what I have said—your father's safety or—"

"You give me no choice," she said, despairingly. "I must consent, you know it, but I will have conditions on my side, I—"

"You shall have anything in reason."

"Thenswear that you will keep the secret!"

"I am ready to do that by any oath you may impose, and it shall be kept."

"And swear to let me alone, never to approach me till I shall ask you to do so; never to allude in any way to the compact between us, or to betray me to anyone."

"I will swear it," he said, with a smile, "without fear, for I know that the day will come when you will remove the veto you have put upon my actions, when we shall be as though this miserable secret had never entered into our daily lives. Give me your hand upon what you have just promised."

With a look of unutterable loathing, but with a gesture as if she were forced to the action against her will, she slowly held out her hand and laid it in his. He grasped it warmly, and carried it to his lips.

"Don't!" she said, with a shiver. "I have promised enough; leave me alone, or I shall go mad!"

"I will not trouble you," he replied. "Give me the note."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Put it back exactly where we, that is, you found it. Mr. Thurston must never know it has been discovered. I will find a way to give him a hint to get rid of it. I think I can do it without his knowing that it has been discovered. Darling! well then, Mildred—Miss Thurston, if you will."

"That will be best," she said, shortly.

"Miss Thurston then be it. Do not look so shocked and unnerved; your face will betray that something is wrong directly, and who knows who may be on the watch?"

"On the watch?"

"Yes; it is no secret, this robbery, and some clue may have been given to the place where to look. Don't look so frightened. I said *may* have been. It will be well for us always to be on our guard; scared faces and trembling lips have taught shrewd people where to look for many a great criminal."

"They shall teach nothing here," Mildred said, resolutely, stilling her trembling with a mighty effort, and forcing her pale lips into a smile as if she feared that even then, as they stood talking, there might be listening ears and watchful eyes.

She watched him in absolute silence, as he

replaced the note and the ring exactly where they had been, and locked the desk. He handed her the keys, saying,—

"It is safe now; only you and I know it;" and then, with a few more low-spoken words, he went his way to his business on the farm, and left her.

Mr. and Mrs. Thurston did not return till late in the evening—she bright and cheerful, invigorated by her little outing; he grave and silent as he had been of late, with a look in his face as if some secret care were weighing him down.

Mildred understood it now. She knew the secret which seemed to be crushing out her father's life, and she longed to tell him that she did so. She longed to throw her arms round his neck as she would have done before that fatal journey, and whisper that she knew all, and would help him to keep the terrible thing from the knowledge of anyone else. But a bar seemed to have suddenly risen up between Malcolm Thurston and his household. He had a concealed care that was pressing him down, and crushing out the life that had been such a charm in his everyday manner.

Mrs. Thurston noticed the paleness of her child's face and her distraught manner, and asked her what ailed her.

"You have been dull here by yourself, darling!" she said. "I am so sorry; we could have taken you after all if we had only known. It was a blunder our not doing so."

"It was better not, mamma dear," the girl said, listlessly. "I have a racking headache, and should have been but poor company. I think I will go to bed."

"Perhaps you had better, dear," her mother said, and Mildred stooped over her chair and kissed her, and then went up to her father and put her hand in his.

"What, no kiss!" he said, wondering at her, for she was generally the most demonstrative of daughters. "Are we growing ceremonious at the Beeches? My dear child, you do look ill. What have you been doing while we have been away?"

"Nothing, papa."

"Then nothing has made you look very pale. Go to sleep, and leave your headache on your pillow, there's a good girl."

He drew her to him and kissed her tenderly, but he felt a little shiver run through her as he embraced her.

"Whatever ails her?" he said, to his wife when she was gone. "She looks quite ill."

"Headaches are tiresome things," Mrs. Thurston said, "and when Millie does have one it is generally a bad one. I will go up and see about her."

But Mildred's door was fast—a most unusual thing—and her mother could not get in.

"It is all right, mamma dear," the girl's voice answered from her bed; "the latch won't hold, and the brownie was in the room, so I turned him out and fastened the door."

The brownie was a big cat, the pet of the household, devotedly attached to Mildred, but not to be allowed in the bedrooms; and Mrs. Thurston, asking another question about the headache, was perfectly satisfied.

It was better, Mildred said, ever so much better already; she would be quite well after a night's sleep. And the mother went to bed herself, quite happy about her daughter, and never dreaming that there was no sleep in that other room, where Mildred was awake and pacing up and down, crying and wringing her hands in passionate despair.

All the light and happiness had suddenly died out of her life, and left it cold and dark. There was only one bright spot in it for her now—her mother. It was for her dear sake that she had consented to the proposal made to her by Paul Clintock. If the wretched secret that her father's desk held were to be known it would kill her gentle mother; and Mildred would have died a hundred deaths to have kept sorrow that she could avert away from that dear head.

She was hardly thinking of herself in that weary night's vigil. What mattered it if

there were no more bright hopes or sweet girlish aspirations in the world for her? So her father was safe and her mother happy she would have gone to her grave cheerfully without a murmur. She had so loved her father, so revered and worshipped him! No daughter in the world had ever such a loving and tender parent! And her idol was shattered—was a thing of clay, after all, and at any moment disgrace and humiliation might come, and their peaceful home be broken up and scattered, while he—ah! she dared not think of it, she would not—she would put the thought away from her for ever; but even as she said it to herself the vision of her father in prison came upon her, and she threw herself on her bed in a passion of weeping, and sobbed herself into a troubled slumber that lasted till the gradual waking up of the life of the farm began to make itself heard, and she roused herself once more to the duties and the sorrow of a new day.

Was she the same Mildred Thurston, she wondered, who had been so happy and cheerful only yesterday? It seemed as if a lifetime of anguish and misery had passed over her since she and Paul Clintock had stood together by her father's old desk, and seen the horrible glitter of that fatal ring. She felt as if she must shriek out her secret to the four winds, tell everybody she saw what a sham the honest respectability of the Beeches was. She must get away; they must let her do what she had often begged to be allowed to try—go somewhere and get her own living. She had seriously asked her father and mother to allow her to do so during the depression that had been upon them of late; there would be nothing in her urging it again.

She must get away. She smiled bitterly to herself as she thought how little choice she had. She was in the power of Paul Clintock. She had bound herself by a promise that was almost an oath to do his bidding, and it could not be done at home. She went down to her breakfast with a very pale face and a sick chill at her heart, but she told her mother it was only the remains of the bad headache, and she forced herself to smile and eat, and they believed her, and took no notice of her, to her great relief. Her father thought her strangely preoccupied and missed her from his side while he was at his desk answering letters and looking over his business books. She had been used to sit by him, and many a bright suggestion, when things were going contrary, had come from his "little lawyer," as he was wont to call her.

"We shall have to send her to the sea for a little while," he said to his wife presently, commenting on Mildred's altered appearance. "I have been too much occupied with my own troubles lately to think of the child's looks. She is pale and thin."

"It is only since yesterday, I think," Mrs. Thurston said. "But I may not have thought as much about her as I ought to. We have passed through such a time of trouble and worry lately that it seems to have changed our very natures."

"We have seen the last of it, dear," he said gently. "The good times that we used to sing about sometimes are coming at last."

"Are you sure of it, Malcolm?"

"As sure as mortal man can be of anything, wife. If I thought you could keep a secret from that daughter of yours I would tell you one."

"Try me."

"I am half afraid. Ever since she was a tiny baby you have told her all your business affairs as if she could understand them. You would never be able to keep this from her; and I would rather she did not know it."

"I will tell her nothing that you do not wish me to," Mrs. Thurston replied gently. "You may trust me even in this, Malcolm."

"My brother is dead, Kate."

She looked at him in amazement. It was like having a curtain lifted that had hung before a sorrowful past, and being brought face to face with things and people long buried.

Mr. Thurston had held no direct communication with his relations in England for the last twenty years, and it was startling to hear of them.

"Dead!" she said. "I wonder if he ever thought of us before he died? He was cruel then. I wonder if he ever felt sorry for it while he lived. But that will not affect you dear—there are his sons."

"He left no sons, dear. Onelad was drowned at Eton years ago—the other, who was a hopeless cripple, has been dead several months. You wondered how I came to get that money so easily. It would not have been advanced to Malcolm Thurston, farmer and stock-breeder: things are different now. I could have had twice as much if I had wanted it for the asking."

"What shall you do?"

"I am waiting for news. If the old man would like to see me I shall go to England; but I shall wait till I know. Waite and his wife were very hospitable to me, and wanted me to send you and the child down to Sydney for a spell. I don't know that it would not be wise to accept their offer for her. She is looking sadly pale and thin."

"Will they not tell her?"

"No! I have told them I wish nothing said about my prospects at present. I am in no hurry to give up our pleasant home life here. The change will come in its own time; we need not anticipate it?"

CHAPTER III.

A TURN OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

"THEN you would like to go, Millie, dear?"

"Oh, yes, mamma; I want to go; I must go!"

"Must, dear?"

Mrs. Thurston hardly understood her daughter. The headache never seemed to have gone quite away; at least the curious listlessness and apathy which had come over Mildred dated from that day. She did not seem at all elated at the prospect of visiting Sydney, though the lawyer's house was gay with young people and full of pleasant things, and she had till now always professed a passionate desire to visit the capital.

She seemed eager to go, but was oddly indifferent about the pretty dresses that her mother insisted on providing for the visit. No wonder the good lady lifted her head in astonishment at her daughter's assertion that she must go.

"I mean, of course, that I should like to go, mamma, dear!" Millie said with a little laugh that had no real ring in it. "I have been dying to see Sydney for an age, and it seems too good to be true now that I am actually starting."

"I was half afraid you did not want to go," Mrs. Thurston said, holding up a hat she was trimming, and looking keenly at her daughter.

"Which will you have, dear, the brown flowers or the yellow?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter a bit, mamma. Put whichever you like in. I shall like it very much. The idea of your thinking I did not care to go! Why, it is never out of my thoughts. I can't sleep at night for thinking of Sydney, and all I shall do there."

Which was perfectly true; but no pleasure entered into her nightly incubations. Mrs. Thurston was not to know that.

"I only wish that your father could have gone with you, my darling!" the mother said. "It seems a long journey for you to take alone, but Paul will take care of you."

"Yes, Mr. Clintock will take care of me," Mildred repeated, a strange look coming into her eyes, "or I can take care of myself, which is quite as well. Mr. Clintock is the one disturbing element in my pleasure, but it was very kind of him to offer to make his journey fit with mine."

No one quite knew how it had come about that Paul Clintock was to be Mildred's escort.

What he wanted generally came to pass somehow, and he did want to go to Sydney at the same time that his employer's daughter did, and he managed to get it arranged.

Mr. Thurston was glad of the chance; there were rough folks about. A fresh gold fever had broken out, and there was a supposed gold-field at no great distance from his home, which brought all sorts of idlers and ne'er-do-wells to the neighbourhood; and he did not like the idea of Mildred travelling alone. Others from the same district were going part of the way, but Paul Clintock suggested that he might go all the way, and transact a little business for Mr. Thurston in Sydney at the same time.

"I can't make her out?" his wife said to him, while the preparations were going on. "She is so odd about this visit. I am afraid she is ill and will not tell me."

"If there was anything serious the matter with her you would know it, my dear!" he said, gently. He was always gentle and loving to his wife. "I expect it is what she tells me—the weather; it is very heavy and unnerving."

"But she takes not a bit of interest in her dresses, and says I may trim her hats as I please. She was always so particular about her things."

"So she will be again. Get her the gowns and things and the interest will come back, or she is no true woman. Girls do get peevish fits sometimes, and I suppose she has one upon her. She will hardly speak to me, and avoids my room as if there were a pestilence in it. I haven't an idea what it all means, but I can wait. It is some girlish fad that will pass away, and leave her her own bright self again."

"It is very odd that the change in her should date from that day!"

"I think that is only your fancy, dear. Nothing happened on that day. Clintock says he saw her. He came to the house for those sheep estimates, and she was just as usual. She wants a change. All girls do sometimes. Is all the finery ready?"

"Very nearly."

"Ah, then the sight of it all paraded will do her a world of good. She is a little hipped here, and longs for a peep at the world. She will like the Waites, and it is as well that she should have a little of the country brusquerie rubbed off her."

"She does not want that. She is as true a lady as any that Sydney can show."

"Of course she is, you vain little woman. She was born one, and good blood will tell, no matter how it is hidden. Don't let the child go to bed to-night without bidding me good-night. She has shirked her kisses lately, and somehow I feel as if there were a bit missing out of the day without it. I can't have her grow too much of a woman to kiss her father."

"She will never do that?" Mrs. Thurston said. "It will all come right, Malcolm. It is you who are fanciful now."

There seemed some foundation for Mr. Thurston's assertion that Mildred evaded him. She would have gone away without going into his room if her mother had not expressly bade her go to him.

"Papa is not busy, dear," she said, gently. "He will think you are neglecting him if you do not go in!"

She little thought what an effort it was to her child to enter the room where her husband sat at his desk. She dreaded seeing it open. It seemed to her that she must shriek out the secret that it held, and tell the shameful story of the ring and the bank-note that lay hidden there to all the world.

How could her father sit there with his hand on the handle of the very drawer where the fatal secret lay, and turn to her and talk to her so carelessly.

"Don't run away, dear!" Mr. Thurston said, as she would have gone as soon as she came in with a curt "Good-night, papa," "come here. I want to speak to you!"

He drew her on to his knee as he spoke, a

favourite seat of hers till this odd new phase of her character had shown itself.

"What has come between my little girl and me?" he asked, caressing her, while it seemed to him that she shrank from his touch. "What has ailed you lately, Millie?"

"Nothing, papa."

"Then what have I done to you that you shrink from me. Surely there must be some reason?"

"Don't ask me, papa. Don't speak of it. Let me alone. You know—you know—ah, I must not speak of it. It must be buried—trampled on till there is no trace left. Don't look at me like that, papa; let me go to bed. My head aches so that I feel as if I were going mad."

"And is it nothing but headaches that have turned my bright little daughter into a sort of Sphinx of mystery and silence these last few weeks?"

"Nothing in the world else, papa," Mildred said. "The headache that began the day you and mamma went out and left me here has never gone away. That is all."

"My child, if that is the case it is a serious matter," Mr. Thurston said gravely, holding her at arms length and regarding her seriously. "I shall begin to think that mamma is right, and that you are really ill. We must have a doctor!"

"Sydney will be my best doctor, papa. Let me go, and I shall come back quite well!"

She smiled as she spoke; but her words and looks startled him. He had never noticed till now how thin and pale she had grown, and how dark circles had come under her eyes, telling of sleeplessness and unspoken suffering. He was really alarmed now. He had thought of nothing hitherto but the odd change in her manner to himself. Now it seemed almost as if she were slipping out of the world before his eyes. He wished that he could take her himself to Sydney; but there was a press of business upon him just then that prevented him from leaving home; and his friend would meet her at the end of her journey, and she would be well cared for on the road.

He had an idea that Paul Clintock had more than just a young man's admiration for a pretty girl in his heart—for Mildred—but he felt sure also that she did not care for him, and he saw no danger of anything unpleasant in allowing the young man to be her escort. He could not quite understand the passionate emotion with which his child clung to him when the hour of parting came. She seemed far more affected than even the occasion of a first absence from home demanded, and clung to him as if she would never let him go. The shadow that had arisen between them vanished for the moment, and left her the old loving impulsive Millie of the past.

The house seemed very empty and desolate when he returned after driving the two young people to the station; but he could tell his wife that Millie had gone off in tolerable spirits after all.

"She smiled and nodded to me as the train moved off," he said. "She had got over her tears; she will be all right before the journey is half over, and the trip will set her up."

He would have wondered not a little if he could have peeped at the pair who for a station or two had the compartment to themselves. Paul Clintock would have drawn the blinds and made things more comfortable for his companion, but she shrank into her corner of the carriage, and bade him sharply let her alone.

"Don't touch me—don't come near me," she said, with a shiver. "Let me alone, or I shall go mad."

"I wanted to make you more comfortable, dear."

"Don't speak like that to me—I am no dear of yours. Don't you know that I hate you—hate you so bitterly, that if it were not for my father's sake I would rather throw myself under the wheels of the train and let it crush the life out of me than ride here with you? Be satisfied that I am going to fulfil my

compact with you. I will break it if you are a finger on me. I cannot trust myself. I have borne so much that I am desperate."

"I can wait," he said, in a singularly quiet and resolute voice. "I am a patient man, and my time will come. It always does come to those who can stay for it. I will trouble you no more when you have fulfilled your promise. You will forgive my being doubtful until that happy moment arrives."

"It will be your own fault if anything happens to prevent it," she replied, almost sullenly. "I am here to abide by the word I gave."

He molested her no further, and their journey passed over without any *contretemps* except a slight delay at a station they stayed at for a short time. He asked her if she would like to walk a little while, and she assented, and let him take her out of the station. They went too far, she told her father when she wrote him an account of her trip—for they lost the train and had to send Mr. Waite a telegram, and go on by the next.

"It was very vexing, of course," she wrote; "and careless as well; but I think there must have been some difference in the clocks. Mr. Waite said it did not signify in the least; I had not kept any dinner or anything waiting. They are all so kind and attentive you can't think. Sydney is a lovely place, and they seem to have planned to take me everywhere. Tell mamma that Mr. Clintock was very attentive and respectful—she will want to know, I am sure—and desperately sorry for the mistakes we made in losing the train. But I don't think the Waites minded it in the least."

Mrs. Thurston was very glad to get this letter; it seemed as if Mildred was regaining her spirits. It was exactly like herself in its cheerful tone.

Her reply to it contained a piece of news that Mildred received with very mingled feeling.

"I think it likely that you will not find Mr. Clintock here when you come back, dear child. He has heard of something in Tasmania that he thinks will suit him, and he is going in a short time to see about it. Your father has left it open to him to return to us if he finds the place will not suit him. It is a farm his friends (I never knew he had any till now) wish him to purchase. I am not sorry on my own account, for there has been something curious and not quite pleasant in his manner to us both since he returned from Sydney; getting a little too grand for his business, I suspect. I know you were not very fond of him, my darling. So I think this will be pleasant news for you."

"Will it?" Mildred said to herself, as she laid down the letter and sat down in the solitude of her own room to think it over for a few minutes. "What will it mean for me? Tasmania. Ah! I will not think of it. I will think only that he will not be there when I go home. I shall have peace and freedom for a little while, at any rate."

She returned home a radiant, restored Mildred; something altered, her mother thought. She seemed to have changed from a child to a woman in the few weeks that had passed over her head.

The bright piquancy and recklessness of speech and action that had been so marked in her had softened down into a sweet womanly repose that was very charming, and her deportment was wonderfully improved.

Mrs. Waite, at her mother's request, had provided her with a new outfit of many things that could not be procured in the country, and she had been keenly observant of the ways of her new friends to her own profit.

"I am glad to be at home, mamma, dear," she said, twining her arms round her mother's neck and kissing her in her old affectionate style. "I never knew how sweet home could be till I went away; and is it really true—have we the place to ourselves?"

"Mr. Clintock is away, dear; if that is what you mean."

"That is just what I do mean; but is he going to stay away?"

"I rather think he is; he wrote something to that effect to your father. He will come back, of course, just to settle up and take his belongings. Why, how pale you have turned, child? What is the matter with you?"

"Not the very least little bit of anything, mamma, darling," Mildred returned, with another hug. "He won't come back yet awhile, will he?"

"Oh, no; not for a couple of months, at least."

"And there's no knowing what may happen in a couple of months. Come along, you dear old mamma, and let me play you the very latest thing in waiters; it is just lovely!"

She sat down to the piano and played, as if she wanted to drive the subject of Paul Clintock out of her mother's head, as indeed she did; and Mrs. Thurston let it drop, and said no more about it.

"There's no knowing what may happen in two months."

Mildred had spoken the words lightly enough, little dreaming of what would happen within a week of her return from Sydney.

She had been roaming about the farm in something of her old girlish fashion, amusing herself with the animals, and talking to the servants on the place, as she had done from a child; and she went in with her hands full of wild flowers and grasses, to find her mother in tears, and her father looking very pale, and unlike himself. With a sudden rush, her thoughts went to that desk in his private room, and a sickening remembrance of what she had found there came over her. Had any new trouble arisen out of it?

She hardly dared ask what was wrong, and her heart gave a great bound of thankfulness when her few agitated words were answered with a cheery smile, and an assurance that nothing was amiss.

"It is the surprise—the shock, dear—that is all," Mrs. Thurston said. "We have had news from England."

"News!" Mildred said; "what news?"

"Your grandfather—my father—is dead!" Mr. Thurston replied.

"I never heard of him!" the girl said, in astonishment. "You never told me he was alive, papa!"

"No, dear. I never thought it would be necessary for you to know anything about him."

"And it is necessary now? Who was he, papa?"

"He was Edgar Thurston Clevor, Earl of Clevor, my dear. I am his heir, and you are the Lady Mildred Thurston Clevor. Don't look so frightened, child! It is true."

It was true. The old Earl was dead, and the news had come through Mr. Waite to the son whom he had discarded with contempt and anger because he had been honest enough to marry the girl he loved instead of railing and deserting her, as many a Clevor would have done.

He was gone now, and all the vast estates in England, all the wealth that had been accumulating during a somewhat penurious life, and the coronet of the old line, had come to this Australian farmer and the despised wife for whose sake he had forsaken his native land and taken up his abode in the wilderness.

Mildred was too much amazed to understand quite all that it meant. The one absorbing idea in her mind seemed the idea that they should leave Australia.

"Shall we go to England, papa?" she asked.

"Certainly, my dear; at once!"

"Then do not tell any one," she said, eagerly.

"Let us go away and not leave a trace behind us to tell what has happened to us."

"That is just my wish," Mr. Thurston said.

"Not quite so secretly as all that, perhaps; but I do want to get away without all the congratulations and fuss that would be our

portion if people knew. I have begged Waite to keep the thing as secret as possible."

"And no one knows but him?"

"No one at present."

"Make him promise not to tell, papa. Let us get away at once—to-morrow, if we can!"

"Not quite so soon as that, my dear. I daresay we can manage it in a fortnight or so. We must give Mr. Clintock time to get back; he may like to take this place over."

"Don't tell him, papa!—don't! Give it to him if you want to. Leave it for him, but don't let him know we are going, or where. You will repent it if you do."

"My dear child, I cannot go away without letting him know. I will hasten our departure all I can—I must do so. I am wanted in England, but it would be dishonourable not to let Mr. Clintock know our whereabouts!"

"Ah, perhaps it would," Mildred said, her mood suddenly changing. "I think I was too much excited to know quite what I was talking about. You will write to him at once, won't you?"

"To-morrow, dear! I could not write a coherent letter to anyone to-night."

"And I will carry it to the post," Mildred said to herself, as she shut herself in her room to try and realize what had come into her life.

An Earl's daughter! The Lady Mildred Thurston Clevor! Her father had said it, and it must be true. Paul Clintock should not know it till she was far away, if a woman's ingenuity could prevent the news from reaching him.

CHAPTER IV.

FAR, FAR ACROSS THE SEA.

MALCOLM THURSTON, busy with a hundred things that cropped up to be done before he could make arrangements for leaving the farm, never guessed the fate of one of the letters that he gave to his daughter to post on the morning after the news came of his accession to the family honours. The event had seemed so far off, as far as he was concerned, that until lately he had never given the possibility of his ever succeeding a thought. His elder brother was a hale, hearty man, with one son at least, who bid fair to be as hearty a man as his father, and failing both these there had been another, who, in spite of his deformity, might live to a good old age, and it had appeared almost impossible that the title should ever fall to the dishonoured son at the Antipodes.

It had come to him now, and he would wear his honours all the more worthily for the hardships that had been his portion till he made a name and a place for himself in the Australian world.

Mildred was at her father's elbow while he wrote his letters that morning, the secret of the desk almost forgotten in the absorbing desire to see what he was going to say to Paul Clintock. The story of that Sydney robbery was an old one now; the police were completely at fault about that and many other things which had happened of late in the capital; the thieves seemed to vanish into thin air, and make themselves invisible—at any rate, they were never to be found. No one thought of the farm at Brandon Beeches or the respectable man who owned it—only his daughter and one other had the clue to that secret. It was forgotten for the present, while Mildred read her father's request to Paul Clintock that he would come back at once, and see him before he went away. None of the other letters contained any allusion to the reason for his leaving Australia, or indeed said that he was going to do so; he was leaving the Beeches, that was all.

Mildred took the letters and went to the post with them all but one, which went to the winds scattered in a thousand pieces as she went along. No act of hers should help Paul Clintock to the knowledge that

there was any change in her life. No one would know. The Lady Mildred Thurston Clevor would be so far removed from Mildred Thurston, the farmer's daughter, that he would never find her, and, if he did, it would be a long time first, and she would have time to think and breathe.

There was no reason for any long delay in getting away. Money had been remitted from England for the use of the new Earl, and Mr. Waite was ready to take all responsibilities of whatever sort off his shoulders. In less than a fortnight from the time of the arrival of the news he and his wife and daughter stood together on the deck of the good ship *Empress of the Sea*, watching the shore of their adopted country fade in the distance as they pressed forward on their way into the untied future.

And Paul Clintock did not know. That thought was uppermost in Mildred's heart as she looked across the blue water and watched the foam sparkle dash against the ship's side. She thought she knew Paul and understood his motives in the compact that had been made between them; he was cleverer than she was, and did not let her into all his secrets. On the very day when the great news reached her father from England Mr. Clintock stood with a friend talking earnestly outside a pretty house not far from Hobart Town. He had received some papers and letters that morning, some of them hailing from Europe, and some from Sydney.

"Just in time," he said, as he folded the last of them, and put it in his pocket. It was an English letter, and its perusal had interested him very much.

"What is just in time?" his friend asked.

"This latter. My experiences as a Tasmanian farmer will be of the shortest. I was always told I should make my fortune suddenly; and it is made to my hand."

"How?"

"Ah! that is the grand secret. I won't tell you how it has come about. But instead of farming here at the Antipodes I shall go to England, and take my proper place in society."

"Your proper place—what is it? Folks who graduate out here as the sons of convicts don't find themselves recognised as eligibles amongst the upper ten at home."

"My descent will not signify. I hold a little talisman which will be my 'open sesame' to whatever I want when I get to London."

"You are talking riddles, my friend. Explain!"

"I don't know why I should tell you, but I will; the thing is certain now. My good friend at Brandon Beeches yonder has no idea that I have any knowledge of what goes on in the old country. He thinks I am an emigrant, like himself. My father was, so it comes to the same thing, only the pater emigrated at the State's expense, and Mr. Thurston didn't. Mr. Thurston is the heir to an Earldom, and will be, before very long, one of the richest and most powerful men in England. I am going to be his son-in-law."

"What! marry his daughter. He will never give her to you!"

"Oh, yes, he will. I know a little secret concerning him that he would give his Earldom when he gets it, to keep secret. His daughter knows it too, and there is only one way of securing my silence!"

"You are a clever fellow, Paul!"

"I have had to be all my life. I came across the knowledge of Thurston's real rank by accident one day when I was looking for something else, and I made it my business to inquire whether it was true. I have had the whole history of his coming to this part of the world from a reliable source, and I know that a mail or two must bring the news of the old Earl's death. In any case, it must bring fortune for me. He will pay liberally to take his name with him to England unsmirched, and his son-in-law will have an interest in keeping his secrets."

"But how about the young lady? Is she willing?"

"I am sure of her," Paul Clintock said, with an evil smile, as he turned away, leaving his friend watching him with envious eyes.

"He has the devil's luck and his own," that worthy said to himself as Paul passed out of sight. "Everything seems to tumble to him as soon as he wants it; and here am I, just as clever, and every bit as good-looking, glad to wear his old clothes, and take what he will give me out of his superabundance."

They had been schoolfellows and remained acquaintances, though the one was fixed in Tasmania, and the other had come to be Malcolm Thurston's helper on his farm. They were about the same age; and there was a certain resemblance between them which was more of expression than feature. They both had the sharp look of men of prey upon their fellows, who are of the tribe of Ishmael, and hold the world as their oyster—to be opened by fair means or foul. The Paul Clintock of Sydney and everywhere else, where he might happen to be, was a very different person from the well-behaved young gentleman who assisted at the Beeches. He was quite another man when he was away, and seemed to have two identities, one of which was utterly strange to his good-natured and warm-hearted employer at the farm.

Even Mildred, who seemed to know him more thoroughly than any of the family, would hardly have recognised the cynical-looking man with the hard smile on his face who stood talking under the verandah of that house by Hobart Town.

She could breathe freely now that she was on the sea, and getting farther and farther away from the country which held him, with every turn of the great screw that twisted and throbbed under the big ship, and churned the water into the trail of foam that looked as if it would stretch all along her wake till her voyage was done.

There was no thought of sea-sickness and its attendant horrors as yet, as she stood by her mother's side drinking in new life with every whiff of the fresh breeze, that tasted as if it had gathered up all the life and strength of the great sea to give her pleasure!

"What do you think of it, dear?" her mother asked, looking with delight at her bright face and sparkling eyes.

Whatever had ailed her had been left behind in her old home; and, indeed, it seemed to Mildred herself as if that wretched day, when she had looked into her father's desk with Paul Clintock at her elbow, were all a hideous dream. It was all over, and she would try and forget it; she could do that, but the love and trust in her father she had loved so dearly would never quite come back to her heart.

"What do I think of it, mummy?" she said, coming close to her mother's side, and stroking her still beautiful hair. "It is glorious! delightful! I have often tried to imagine what it must be like to make a voyage—I never imagined it could be anything like this!"

"I feel twenty years younger!" Mrs. Thurston said. She had declined to be anything else till they should land in England, and their names had been entered on the ship's books as "Mr. and Mrs. Thurston and daughter," and it is doing your papa good too," she added, with a loving look towards him as he stood with his hands full of papers and letters given to him the minute before they started. Mr. Waite's clerk had come with them, so that they might have the very last news before they started.

He was looking grave over something he was reading, and Mildred stole to his side and slipped her arm through his.

"What is it, papa?" she asked. "Any news?"

"Yes, dear."

"What, papa? You look so grave over it."

"I daresay I do, my love; I am startled and shocked. Mr. Clintock—"

"What about him, papa? He is not coming after us, is he?"

"My dear, what an idea! You did not

like him. I know he will never trouble you any more—he is dead!"

"Dead!"

The word came from her lips with a great gasp. Her heart seemed to stop beating, and the sea and sky to surge together as if the world were coming to an end. Her father looked at her, wondering at her white face. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that the dislike had only been pretended, that Mildred had any real affection for the young man? If so, all was well ended—nothing could come of it now.

"Where? How?" she presently found breath to ask.

"It was an accident, dear," her father said, and put a letter and some papers into her hands.

She sat down and read them, read the news that the terrible secret she had shared with this man might be a secret for ever now—there was nothing to fear. Paul Clintock would never speak in this world more, or betray her or anyone else.

Scarcely twenty-four hours after his conversation with his friend he had crossed the threshold of the silent land, and solved the mighty problem that has puzzled the whole human race since death came into the world.

He had been doing a foolhardy thing—climbing to the top of an unfinished building, which had been stopped for want of the funds to finish it, and the scaffolding had been rotten and insecure, and had come down with him in the midst of the rattling boards and falling poles.

Death must have been instantaneous those said who saw him when he was picked up. His head was crushed in completely, and many bones were broken besides. There were plenty of memoranda in his pocket to identify him by, and the news had been sent to his friends in Sydney and elsewhere as soon as possible. He had been buried where the catastrophe occurred, and his belongings would be forwarded to Mr. Waite's office as soon as they were gathered together.

It was not pleasant news to hear on the very threshold of a new life, as it were. The chances that any of them would ever see Paul Clintock again, as far as Mr. Thurston knew, were very small; but the young man had served him well, and had been intimately associated with him in his business, and it was a shock to hear of his untimely end in such a fashion.

Mildred gave the papers and letters back to her father and very soon vanished from the deck. Her mother seeking her found her in her berth very pale, and with a terrible headache she said.

The news had been too sudden, and it was hardly wise to tell her in that abrupt fashion, perhaps. She would be better after a night's rest, and the sea air and the novelty of the voyage would soon drive all uncomfortable thoughts out of her head.

It was past midnight, and the ship had settled down into the quiet that comes with the darkness, and Mrs. Thurston was asleep when she was roused by a touch, and opened her eyes to see the stewardess standing beside her.

"I am sorry to disturb you, ma'am," she said; "but will you come to the young lady? I am afraid she is ill."

In a moment the mother was on her feet and alert, and the stewardess told her that a few minutes before she had been roused by Mildred's coming to her side and saying something about her father's desk, and a secret, and that somebody was dead.

She had taken the girl's hand, thinking it was only an ordinary case of sleep-walking; she had had ladies do it before the first night at sea, and she thought nothing of it; but Mildred's hand was burning, and her cheeks flushed as if with fever. She could not get her to lie down; she was sitting up in her berth, talking still, and she thought her mother had better come to her.

Fever indeed! Mrs. Thurston was tho-

roughly frightened at Mildred's appearance, and sent the steward to summon her husband. She was sitting up in her bed, appealing to her father in piteous tones to hide or burn something.

"The cat's-eye ring and the old bank-note," she kept repeating. "They can be hidden now for ever, papa; only Paul and I knew where they were, and we kept the secret—kept it well, did we not?"

"What is she talking about?" her mother asked in dismay. "What secret, Malcolm?"

"I have no idea," Mr. Thurston said. "I have no secret that I know of. There was nothing in my desk that the wildest romancer could concoct a mystery out of," he added, as Mildred began again.

"The desk can be left open now. Only Paul knew, and he is dead. I kept my promise to him, but I am free now. Free! Free!"

She burst into discordant laughter, and then fell back, meaning out that it was no use; the note would not burn and the ring would not sink when they threw it into the sea. It was always there shining with a light of its own, and pointing the way to the discovery.

"It is that Sydney robbery that has got hold of her in some way," her father said, in perplexity. "What has she got into her head about it? I remember her saying something odd to me about my desk before we left home."

"I cannot understand it!" Mrs. Thurston said with tears. "It is horrible to hear her go on that way always. Paul! Can it be that she cared for him?"

"She will tell us when she is better," Mr. Thurston said, with a grave look, as he caught a sentence from the fevered lips. "I fancy that his death has rid the world of a villain. Millie will tell us when she is better."

The hastily-summoned doctor gave it as his opinion that Miss Thurston's illness was the result of a long-continued strain on her nerves. Something had been preying on her mind. He did not fear for her. The voyage would set her up when he had once reduced the fever. It was partly hysteria, and a few hours would see a marked change in her. He administered some soothing medicine, and the wild delirium was conquered, and in the morning Mildred was herself again—very weak and languid, but with all her faculties clear.

"Mamma," she said to her mother who sat by her side, thankful to see the improvement. "Is it true?"

"Is what true, dear?"

"That he is dead, Paul Clintock?"

"Don't talk now, darling! You are to be very quiet, or you will be ill again."

"Yes, I know. I will be quiet if you will tell me, mamma. It haunts me. Papa said so, did he not?"

"It is true, dear."

"Thank Heaven! Mamma dear, what was I talking about last night?"

But Mrs. Thurston had no answer to that question.

Millie had only talked nonsense, she said—words without any meaning. There would be time enough to tell her anything about that when she was quite well.

The time soon came. In a very few days she was on deck again drinking in new life with the fresh sea air; and looking prettier than ever, as she lay on her cushions in her loose wrapper. Mr. Thurston took his opportunity one afternoon when his wife was lying down to talk to Mildred.

"Darling, are you strong enough for a chat with me?" he asked caressing her little hand, very thin and white now, and not at all like the brown but shapely paw, as she used to call it, of the old Australian days. Those days seemed very far behind them now.

"I am strong enough for anything, dear," she said. "There is nothing the matter with me now but laziness. What do you want to talk about?"

"About something you said, child, when you were taken ill. What is the mystery about my old desk, Millie? and what do you know about a cat's-eye ring and an old bank-note? They were part of the things inquired for after that great robbery. What put them into your head?"

"Oh, papa, don't ask me—don't ask me!"

"I must ask you, child. There is something in the business I cannot fathom. What have you or I to do with it?"

"Oh papa, do not talk of it; you know."

"I do not know, child; but I must and will! Why did you bag me to burn the note. Do you know where it is?"

"I know where it was, papa?"

"And where was it; and what had Paul Clintock to do with it? His name was always mixed up with it in your wild talk. Child, I don't want to give you a moment's pain; but there is a mystery, and it must be solved."

He was looking into her face with loving, anxious eyes as he spoke, and she burst into tears.

"Oh papa, papa!" she wailed. "Why do you make me speak? You know where the note and the ring were. Paul and I found them, and he would only promise not to tell on one condition; and I kept it. I kept it; but I am free now! He is dead."

Mr. Thurston began to comprehend now, and drawing his daughter into his arms he got from her the whole terrible story, trying very hard while he listened not to curse the dead man who had planned and carried out such a cruel piece of villainy. That Paul Clintock had put the articles there himself and removed them afterwards he felt sure. He had been to his desk daily since that time, and no such things had been there. Mildred believed they were where she had seen them, and had passed through years of anguish in her sorrow and anxiety for her father.

"And my little girl believed her father guilty of all this?" he said, in a pained tone, and Millie hid her face, and sobbed out that she was forced to.

"You were so troubled, papa," she said; "and that money came so easily, and you never had to pay it back again. Paul told me all that when I said I was sure that you did not; and then the ring and the note. I thought I should have died of it all."

"My poor child!" Mr. Thurston said. "No wonder you looked ill. And that scoundrel; but he is gone to his account, and it is not for us to judge him. Look me in the face, dear, while I tell you that I never saw either the ring or the note. The money came to me through the lawyer, Mr. Waite; and the reason there was no paying back was simply that the news that I was the next heir to the title had just come, and means were sent to me from home. I should not have taken the money under any other circumstances; but our home was threatened, as you know, and I thought of my dear ones there and pocketed my pride."

Mildred could only gasp out prayers for forgiveness, and weep out the care and anxiety of the past wretched weeks on her father's breast; and he kissed her, and they agreed to keep the secret of all that had happened from her mother. Paul Clintock was dead, and there was no need to bring his name into their lives any more.

CHAPTER V.

THE LADY MILDRED.

A YEAR had gone by—a whole year from the time when the Earl of Clever had come into his inheritance and journeyed from the Antipodes to take possession of his dead father's place and name.

Society had been much exercised about the family at first, and people were disposed to think that they would only be one remove from savages; that the father and mother would be bores, and the daughter a wild, untamed thing all unfit for a place in a London drawing-room.

The leading belles of the season and their followers anticipated no small amusement from the advent of the new Lady Mildred.

Mildred was the family name of the ladies of the house; every branch had a Mildred, and most of them noted for their beauty and accomplishments. This untalented Australian girl—the daughter of a nobody, as far as her mother was concerned—would be a new departure in the annals of the house; and her picture, if it were painted, would be a good foil to the stately grace of the counterfeit presentments of the other Mildreds on the walls of the picture-gallery.

But little was seen of the new-comers for some time after the reception that was accorded them on their arrival at the English Brandon Beeches, the old place after which Malcolm Thurston had named his Australian farm. The people there had reported that they were "real Clevers," handsome, aristocratic-looking, and gracious-mannered; but society in town ignored the verdict of the country and waited.

The arrival had been in the autumn, and the first drawing-room of the following spring saw the Countess of Clever and her daughter presented by the premier duchess of the kingdom, and the world held its breath and wondered. For many a season there had been nothing like the mother and daughter seen at Court.

All sorts of reports were rife about the elder lady, who was said to have been a servant, a nobody—some one even worse than a scullery-maid.

It was all false. She was a lady, if gentle birth and good breeding can make one; but she had been only a poor, hard-worked nursery governess when Malcolm Thurston fell in love with her and made her his wife, in spite of the anathemas of his family.

She came upon the fashionable crowd at St. James's like a revelation—this graceful, white-haired woman, lovely still in spite of her snowy locks, which told of privation and long-past suffering—and she moved to the Royal presence not one whit abashed nor nervous, but with as much ease and dignity as if she had breathed the air of a Court all her life, and to bend over the hand of her Royal mistress were no new thing with her.

Her dress was in perfect taste, as plain as the regulations of the place allowed, but rich and costly, and she wore the famous family diamonds—gems which had not seen the light for many a long year; for the last Countess of Clever had been in her grave ever since her youngest son was a child, and the late Earl would not permit his daughter-in-law to wear them.

"Only the Countess wears these jewels," he said, shortly, to his son, when he asked for the diamonds for his wife. "When Geraldine rules here she can have them; for the present she has her own, plenty of them—the pick of her father's stock."

The eldest son of the house had made a *mesalliance*, as well as his brother; but her father had been well able to pay for his daughter's coronet, and to settle his son-in-law's debts, and he had been useful to the Earl in a great many business matters; so, altogether, it was convenient to forget the business, and to receive the young lady as the future Countess without any uncomfortable disapprobation.

The diamonds had never shone brighter than they did on the neck and arms of the new Countess, and gleamed on the dark velvet she had chosen for her dress.

"A lovely woman!" was the universal verdict, and she swept up the room wearing her long train as if she had been used to Courts all her life. But every eye was presently upon the fair girl who followed her, perfectly self-possessed also; but with a wildly beating heart, nevertheless, to pay her duty to her Queen. A lovelier vision than the Lady Mildred had not burst upon fashionable London for many a day. The most pitiful envy could see nothing but perfect taste in the dainty white dress and the pure wax-like

blossoms that adorned it. Even the belle of the season, looking at her with a little shrug and the least breath of a sigh, whispered to her mother,—

"I may go in again, mamma. I shall have no chance with her."

(To be concluded in our next.)

THE GOLDEN HOPE.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXI.

Happiness courts thee in her best array;
But, like a misbehaved and sullen wench,
Thou poutest upon thy fortune and thy love;
Take heed, take heed, for such die miserable.

—SHAKESPEARE: *Henry IV.*

THE train that carried Sir Richard Haughton back to North Eldon, with a heart overflowing with tenderness and sympathy for his unfortunate betrothed, carried also Mr. Kenneth, whose brotherly regard for his sister had been quickened by news of her supposed recent escape from death at Hellice's hands. The two gentlemen made the journey in almost perfect silence.

The very thought of arguing Hellice's innocence, and thus conceding a possibility of her guilt, was insupportable to the young lover, and Mr. Kenneth, astute lawyer as he was, and deeply as he had been interested in the accused maiden, entertained no doubt of her guilt, and had little patience with what he considered a blind and foolish faith in her.

So the two gentlemen preferred to maintain a rigid silence, speaking only at intervals upon the most common-place subjects, although Mr. Kenneth was now and then tempted to express his pity for the Baronet, and endorse with emphasis the advice that had been given Sir Richard by Lady Redwoode.

At North Eldon they found Miss Kenneth's old-fashioned coach in waiting. They entered it together, and still in silence were driven rapidly towards Holly Bank. It was dark when they arrived at their destination, and the comfortable, rambling old house was lighted throughout. They sprang out, and were met within the wide hall by the spinster herself, who had attired herself in honour of her brother's coming.

Her dress was composed of heavy dead-green silk, and her cap-ribbons were of the same unbecoming hue. The effect of her attire was to render her complexion more than ever sallow, and to throw into relief the livid circles around her sunken eyes. Her appearance confirmed her story of attempted poisoning beyond all cavil in the mind of her brother.

"My poor sister!" he exclaimed, in tones of deep feeling, embracing her affectionately. "Thank Heaven! Your life has been spared!"

"Yes, thank Heaven!" reiterated the spinster, "I still live, brother; but I doubt if I shall ever recover from the effects of the poison. That misguided girl carries death wherever she goes. Another day of her presence at Holly Bank would have been enough to destroy us all!"

"She will not be here another day, sister," replied the lawyer, following Miss Kenneth into the pleasant drawing-room, accompanied by Sir Richard, whose grave, stern face was becoming impatient and eager. "Sir Richard Haughton and I have come to relieve you of your charge. We will set out by the morning train with Miss Glinwick. Lady Redwoode consents to receive her again at Redwoode, and will resume her guardianship of her niece."

"Be kind enough, madam, to summon Miss Glinwick at once," interposed the young Baronet, after a fruitless survey of the pleasant apartment. Miss Kenneth looked from

her brother to Sir Richard, and back again with an expression of helplessness and anxiety.

Her manner impressed the lover with sudden fear.

"Hellice is not ill?" he cried.

"Not ill!" stammered the spinster, looking appealingly at her brother. "I couldn't help it Sir Richard—I did my best to prevent it—but she is gone!"

"Gone!" echoed the Baronet and the lawyer in a breath.

"Yes; she went this morning," said Miss Kenneth, desperately. "I—I told her what I had written to Lady Redwoode. That, and Lady Redwoode's letter, refusing the Baroness's consent to her marriage with Sir Richard Haughton, and the consciousness that she had been thoroughly exposed, drove her nearly frantic. She rushed out into the garden, and I did not see her again for two hours. When she came in at last, she was as pale as death, her eyes glowed like fireballs, and her manner was as quiet as—our rector's. She went upstairs without a word and came down again in the course of an hour, with her bonnet on, her bag in her hand, all packed for travelling, and told me she was going away—"

"My poor, poor darling!" ejaculated Sir Richard, involuntarily, with a quivering lip and darkening eyes.

"What did you say to her?" demanded Mr. Kenneth.

"Of course I forbade her departure. I told her you would be here this evening without fail, but all I could say made no impression upon her. She was as cold and haughty as a princess could possibly be. She thanked me for my hospitality, requested that her luggage should be sent to Redwoode, and walked out as quietly as if she had been only going for a stroll in the garden."

"You should have stopped her!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Why did you not detain her?"

"How could I?" said the spinster. "I had no authority to do so. She was my guest, and not my prisoner. I had no right to control her actions."

"Where did she go?" asked Sir Richard, arousing himself from his grief, seeing the necessity for prompt action.

"I don't know. I supposed she would go to Sea View or Redwoode by the evening train."

"She may have done so," said the Baronet, with an accession of hope. "Your coachman drove her to North Eldon then?"

"She went on foot and alone, and took the road that leads to North Eldon," responded Miss Kenneth, in a tone that inclined strongly to hysterics. "You must not blame me, Sir Richard, for allowing her to go in the way she did. I have suffered enough already on her account, without being blamed by her friends. Only think, brother," she added, addressing the lawyer, "Miss Glintwick had the impertinence to tell me this morning that I had not been suffering from poison at all, but simply from indigestion! As if I did not know my own symptoms!"

"Sir Richard," said Mr. Kenneth, "making no comment upon his sister's aggrieved statement, "Miss Glintwick is doubtless at this moment laying her case before Lady Redwoode. She was wise to lose no time in seeking her ladyship and making provisions for the future. We will follow her by the early morning-train. Of course you will spend the night at Holly Bank?"

The young Baronet was compelled to accept this invitation, as a return to Redwoode that night was impossible. He believed that Hellice had gone back to Redwoode, and soothed himself by believing that at that very moment she was winning her way back to the heart of the Baroness.

The evening was long and passed away drearily. Miss Kenneth entertained her guests with details concerning Hellice and her own sufferings, and boasted of her own forbearance and long-suffering. Sir Richard

scarcely listened to her, and was glad when he was shown to his room at last—the very room that had lately been occupied by his betrothed.

He knew at once that it had been her chamber, the position of the window at which he had seen her proving the fact. But there were other proofs that touched him yet more nearly. A lace-bordered handkerchief faintly scented with jasmine, lay in a window-seat. A volume of poems, prettily bound, and marked in delicate pencilings in its noblest passages, lay on the centre-table. A fan, formed of the gorgeous plumage of some tropical bird, and set in gold and ivory, lay forgotten on the mantel-piece—a fan which Sir Richard had often seen in Hellice's hand, played with more than Spanish grace.

The handkerchief and book he put into his pocket, moved by the spirit that animates all lovers to gather up and treasure some token that had belonged to the best loved one. There was an atmosphere of purity about the room, an air of lightness and grace that seemed to him to have emanated from Hellice, who was the incarnation of grace. There, in the room where she had passed sad and sleepless hours, he thought of her, and his soul responded to hers in greater strength and love, and an ineffable longing came over him to gather his betrothed in his arms and nestle her in his bosom, where no token of the world's harshness or malice could reach her.

He waited impatiently for the morrow that would, he hoped, restore to him his love.

Yet that morrow was doomed to bring him only disappointment.

Miss Kenneth and her guests met at the breakfast table, and soon after the conclusion of the repast the gentlemen set out in the family coach for North Eldon. Arrived at the station, Sir Richard made enquiries concerning Hellice, but could not ascertain that she had been at the station on the previous day or evening. The guards and porters had no recollection of having seen a young lady answering to her description, and further enquiries elicited the fact that the trespasser had been booked by the previous night's train to Wharton.

Encouraging himself with the fancy that Hellice might have forgotten to procure a ticket, Sir Richard gave himself little uneasiness as to her whereabouts or safety. Mr. Kenneth was equally assured, and the two gentlemen entered the railway-carriage.

The Redwoode carriage awaited them on their arrival at Wharton, and Sir Richard's first words to the coachman were, if Miss Glintwick had returned home. He was answered in the negative. Then, for the first time, a foreboding of evil entered the Baronet's mind.

"Not returned!" he said, growing pale. "Why, Miss Glintwick left Holly Bank yesterday, and yet she has not arrived. What can this mean, Mr. Kenneth?" he asked in a lower tone, addressing the lawyer. "Hellice knew no one in England to whom she could go in her distress. Can she have destroyed herself in her despair?"

He asked the question in a hollow whisper, and awaited a reply as a condemned man awaits the sentence of death.

Mr. Kenneth's rosy little face turned singularly pale.

"Nonsense!" he ejaculated, testily. "The girl is a great deal too crafty to do such a thing. I beg your pardon, Sir Richard. I should have said that Miss Glintwick does not belong to the weak and unstable class from which suicides are chiefly drawn. She has a will strong enough to conquer even greater difficulties; a soul resolute enough to remain undaunted even by greater reverses; and nothing, I imagine, could possibly drive her to self-destruction. Under different circumstances and training, she would have been a glorious woman. When I look at her in this way, I disbelieve in her guilt—"

"Thank you," interrupted the Baronet, quietly. "I think also that Hellice would not

commit suicide. She may be at Redwoode, after all. There are other stations near at hand besides Wharton, and she might have spent the night at one of them."

"If not, she has probably written to the Baroness," said the lawyer. "At any rate, Lady Redwoode must be consulted immediately with regard to her niece."

This assertion could not be controverted, and Sir Richard preceded Mr. Kenneth to the carriage, the two entered, and they were driven to Redwoode.

The family was gathered in the pleasant breakfast-room, awaiting the arrival of the exiled maiden with widely different emotions. Lady Redwoode's heart was throbbing wildly, and an eager light flickered in her lovely eyes.

The declaration of Sir Richard's belief that Hellice and not Cecile was her child haunted her still, and she was prepared to meet the wronged girl without reproaches, even with kindness and affection. Cecile and Andrew Forsythe were both uneasy and thoughtful, dreading Hellice's return above all things, but the pulses of the latter were quickened at the thought of meeting the peerless maiden whom he passionately loved.

When Sir Richard Haughton and Mr. Kenneth were ushered into the room, the waiting ones looked in vain for one who came not with them.

"Hellice, where is she?" asked Lady Redwoode, in surprise.

"Is she not here?" questioned the young Baronet.

"Here? How should she be here?" said her ladyship, wonderingly. "Have you not brought her with you?"

Sir Richard replied by telling his story. Lady Redwoode's heart sank as she listened, and Cecile's blue eyes sparkled with a joy she could not hide. The Baroness, Sir Richard, and Mr. Kenneth, all observed her delight at Hellice's non-appearance, and all were disgusted at her ill-timed exhibition of pleasure.

"Hellice must be sought for at once," declared Lady Redwoode, when the lover's story had been concluded. "I shudder at the thought of that friendless young girl being left to herself. She is as ignorant of the world as a child, and her extraordinary beauty will draw upon her the eyes of the wicked, dissolute and unprincipled. Search for her. Engage detectives to hunt for her. I shall not know one happy moment until she is found!"

She paused, astonished by an unmistakable sneer that rested on Cecile's lips. On finding that she was observed, the girl's countenance changed, and she exclaimed, lightly:

"Why should you search for Hellice, mamma, after her terrible display of ingratitude to you? Suppose you should bring her back to Redwoode, she might poison you most effectually at a time when even my love and care could not save you. I will not have Hellice under this roof—"

She stopped abruptly, awed by the stern glance that shot with lightning power from Sir Richard Haughton's eyes—a glance that struck horror to her guilty soul, assuring her that he held her in his power, and could expose her wickedness to the being she had most deceived. She held her breath in terror.

"Cecile!" said the Baroness, gravely, looking at the girl with a cold, calm gaze that gave another pang to her disquietude, "do not let me hear any further allusions to the cause of your cousin's expulsion from Redwoode. My home shall be Hellice's henceforth and always."

"Why, mamma!" faltered Cecile, abashed and confounded, "I thought you hated my cousin!"

"Hated her! Oh, heaven!" exclaimed Lady Redwoode, with irrepressible anguish. "Hate Hellice, when I do not know but that she is my own child! Hate her, when I long for her presence daily and nightly!"

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

A STRAIGHT TIP.—That on a lightning rod.
Is Death's door opened with a skeleton
key?

WHERE to go when short of money—Go to
work.

THE man on the fence expects to save him-
self by a hedge.

SOCIETY WOMAN:—"I understand Miss K.
is a perfect bud—never came out at all."

It is difficult for a drinking man to hold
his breath; it is generally too strong for him.
A LAWYER is like a restless man in bed.
He lies first on one side, and then on the
other.

AN expert clergyman at marrying could
make about four knots an hour with favour-
able wind.

IN Paris they consider that everybody
who attempts suicide by jumping into the
river there is in Seine.

JUDGE—"The prisoner is discharged."
Prisoner—"Well, begorra, I didn't know I
was loaded!"

A LADY correspondent wants to know why,
since the invention of needle guns, women
can't fight as well as men.

LANGUAGE was made to conceal thought.
A masher has no use for language, then, for
he has no thought to conceal.

WIFE:—"In the game of lawn tennis, my
dear, what is the most difficult thing to
acquire?" Husband—"The lawn."

THE young lady who wanted her sweet-
heart close at hand, explains it on the ground
that 'twas only a nigh deer of her own.

THERE should be four ghosts in Hamlet,
according to a line in Gray's Elegy—"The
rude four fathers of the Hamlet sleep."

IT has been estimated that a pair of wrens
destroy at least six hundred insects a day.
They do this to wrenovate their systems.

POLITE BURGLAR—"Madam, you are too
young to wear such unfashionable jewellery.
You must really permit me to recommend a
new set."

"YOUNG MAN," said the temperance re-
former, "do you drink?" "Yes," replied the
youth; "but you'll have to excuse me. I've
just had two treats."

DAWDLER (wearily) — "Aw — bawkesper,
give me—aw—a new dwink; something I've
neww had befaw." Barkeeper—"Yes, sir."
Passes out a glass of ice-water.

BUSINESS MAN: "You vagabond! You sent
in word that you would see me on business,
and when I ask what your business is, you
beg." Vagabond: "But you forget, sir;
begging is my business."

"Don't you suppose," said a member of
the police force, "that a policeman knows a
rogue when he sees him?" "No doubt," was
the reply. "But the trouble is that he does
not seize a rogue when he knows him."

BROWN: "A villain has been swindling a
lot of folks. He passed himself off as me,
and gathered in quite a sum of money."
Fogg: "Passed himself off as you? Why,
the rascal must be lost to all sense of shame!"

"THERE is an honest man," said the sage,
pointing to a grocer, standing in his doorway.
The fat reporter watched him as he turned
and went into his shop, and then turning to
the sage, said: "Well, I don't know. It is
evident that he has been lying in weight (wait)
for a customer."

YOUNG WIFE: "Oh, Mr. Jones, I'm so
sorry Tom brought you home to dinner
to-day! If he had told me you were coming,
I'd have had something nice, and I haven't a
thing in the house fit to eat." Mr. Jones:
"Now please don't say a word about it. My
dear madam. You needn't worry yourself a
particle. I take most of my meals at home
myself."

A PORTION of the roof of a lunatic asylum
was blown off the other day. Evidently un-
sound in the upper stories.

"WHATEVER you do, my boy, begin at the
bottom and work up." "But, father, sup-
pose I were going to dig a well?"

"My dear," he said, "what is the difference
between ingenious and ingenuous?" "The
difference between u and i," she replied, and
he scratched his head for a diagram.

"WELL, Lottie," said a young cadet,
"which do you prefer, the army or the navy?"
"I—I prefer the arm-y, George," replied the
young girl, as he slipped his sleeve around her
waist.

KIND old lady: "What's the matter, little
boy?" Little boy (crying bitterly): I lost
twopence." Kind old lady: "Well, here is
twopence more for you; don't cry. How did
you lose it?" Little boy (feeling better): "I
lost it tossing."

"I HAVE a bit of good news for you John,"
said a fond young wife. "Yes?" replied
John, expectantly. "Yes. You remember
that two weeks ago hothouse grapes were
quoted at twenty-five shillings a pound? Well,
to-day I bought some for a pound."

"SAY, little sweetness," said Colonel Jones
to the pretty servant girl, as he put his arm
around her waist and kissed her, "if I had
only met you twenty years ago!" "Well,
that wouldn't have been so good," she replied,
as she got closer to the door. "Why wouldn't
it, pet?" asked the old codger. "Because I
was only six months old then."

A LITTLE boy at a village school had written
the word "psalm" in his copy-book, and
accidentally blotted out the letter "p" with
his sleeve. His little sister, sitting at his side,
burst into tears over the disaster, but the
spelling reformer defiantly exclaimed, "What
if I did leave him out? He didn't spell
nothing, and what was the good of him?"

OMAHA man: "Are those pug dogs intelli-
gent?" Omaha lady (proud owner of pug):
"Oh, their intelligence is almost human."
"I am surprised to hear that." "I can't
begin to tell you how much the dear little
fellows know." "Mercy me! Jane! Jane!
Where are you?" "Here, mum." "Run
out as fast as you can and bring the dog in.
It's raining."

WIFE: "I want a new hat." Husband:
"What's the matter with the one you have?"
W: "It is a perfect fright." H: "Who
bought it?" W: "I did." H: "And you
think it is a perfect fright after selecting it
yourself? It is clear that your taste is not
to be relied upon. I will keep my eye open
as I am going about the city and select one
for you myself, and you shall have a good one
if it takes me a year to find it."

A GOOD old lady, who had always suspected
a pretentious member of her church of being
a hypocrite, and had uniformly predicted an
unfortunate fate for him, was reading a
flattering account of his funeral, which
annoyed her greatly, till she came to the
statement that "the deceased died in the
odour of sanctity," when she threw up her
hands and exclaimed: "There! I always
said he'd never die in his bed!"

OBSERVATIONS.

SHE is a girl of much vigour of character
who can reject a lover who proposes just at
the height of the ice-cream season.

"FORTUNE knocks once at every man's
door," but she doesn't go round the bar-rooms
looking for him if he isn't in when she calls.

SELF-MADE men are seldom dissatisfied with
their work; and, after knowing some of them,
we are not infrequently forced to the con-
clusion that they are very easily pleased.

THE man who truly loves his wife will find
a proper place, either up in the garret or down
in the cellar, in which to keep his wearing
apparel, and not go crowding her dresses out
of the closets.

A CLERGYMAN, who was very zealous in his
ministerial work, in walking along a lonely
road overtook a pedestrian, and after a few
moments asked him in a solemn tone: "Are
you prepared to die, sir?" The man, sup-
posing that he had been overtaken by a high-
wayman, who was about to kill him shouldered
murder, and fled at the top of his speed.

A MAN who had become annoyed beyond
endurance by the fault-finding of his children
with their food, exclaimed at dinner: "You
children are intolerable! You turn up your
noses at everything. When I was a boy I
was often glad enough to get dry bread to
eat!" "Poor papa!" said little Rose, the
family pet—"poor papa! I'm so glad you're
having so much nicer times living with
mamma and us!"

A MISSIONARY who had been in China said
that a Chinese thief is the most impudent
creature on earth, and being asked to give
some facts to substantiate his assertion, he
said: "The clock in the hall of my mission
residence was stolen one night, and the next
afternoon the thief brought it to me to show
him how to wind it up." "And did you do
it?" asked an auditor. "No," answered the
missionary; "but I wound the thief up so
thoroughly that it took him six months in
jail to run down."

A MAN and his wife once sat down to com-
pose epitaphs for each other. The husband,
who had led rather an unquiet life of it,
suggested the following for his better half:

"Here lies my wife,
And, Heaven knows,

Not less for mine than for her own repose."

On reading this, the wife jumped up, and in a
fit of exasperation, exclaimed: "You mean
old thing, you shan't have any epitaph at all!
I'll leave your tombstone as smooth as your
old bald pate!"

A VETERINARY surgeon, in writing about an
equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington,
says he has dissected it with his eye, and the
following are the particulars of its singular
anatomy. The head is a unicorn's; the nos-
trils are those of a pig; the eyes are police-
men's bull's-eyes; and the carcass is that of
prize cow. Its tail is taken from the circus,
and the stiffness of its legs is evidently bor-
rowed from the clothes-horse. In short, its
parts are so heterogeneous that he does not
know what to call it, unless it is "an omnibus
horse in high keep."

STORY OF A DOCTOR AND A MONKEY.

THE wife of a celebrated Western divine has
such a fancy for Angora cats that she has a
room devoted to them, leading out of which a
gallery is built, so the animals can have
exercise and fresh air without wandering
away.

An old college friend met the doctor on the
street lately, and, not having seen each other
for some years, the meeting was most pleasant.
At last he asked,—

"George, what are you doing now?"

"Well," said he, "I am married, am pastor
of a fine church, and get a good salary."

"And your wife?"

"My wife! my wife! oh, she is in the he cat
raising business!"

In addition to the cat craze, a monkey was
added to the household menagerie, and all
went pleasantly until one day, as the doctor
stepped into his bath, the monkey jumped in
with him. Then there was wrath in the old
man's eye, when, after a brief struggle, he
left the bath tub, holding the monkey by the
neck, both dripping with water, marched into
the recess of his good lady, saying,—

"Madam, this monkey business has gone
too far; you must decide between me and the
monkey!"

She looked placidly up from a cat she was
petting, saying,—

"Will you give me twenty-four hours to
decide, doctor?"

The monkey is still a member of the house-
hold.

SOCIETY.

A LARGE Garden Party was given on the 27th ult., at Knebworth House, the beautiful seat of Lord Lytton, in Hertis. It was a brilliant gathering. The gardens are lovely, the flower beds a mass of gorgeous colouring, which shows to great advantage in perfect weather. Tennis was quite neglected, and the guests wandered about the terraces and shrubberies while the band of the Bedfordshire Militia played a charming selection of music. Tea was served in the banquet hall.

Two recesses were thrown open, the one displaying a collection of silver-plate, and the other gold-plate. After tea the company dispersed over the beautiful house, and amused themselves looking at the fine old pictures and tapestry. In the ante-room to the drawing-room there is some rare old bugle tapestry.

Lady Lytton was becomingly dressed in fawn silk with a bonnet to match; Lady Betty Lytton wore a plain white silk, made with a coat bodice, and folded waistcoat, bonnet of white tulle, with yellow roses; Lady Constance Lytton wore lemon-coloured founard, trimmed with brown velvet, a brown straw hat, with velvet to match; Mrs. Metcalf wore a beautiful dress of moss-green cashmere, and petticoat of cream brocade, with a design of green velvet leaves; Mrs. Edwin Progers wore dark green silk, trimmed with Indian embroidery; her daughter, the young Baroness de Froissart, was attired in pale blue silk, with flounces of pinked-out drapery, and bodice of cream lace, bonnet to match.

A toilette charming in its simplicity was worn by Miss Porter; a long coat, with revers of white alpaca, with handsome cut steel buttons. Mrs. Bazendale wore sapphire velvet; Mrs. Salisbury Hughes a bicuit-coloured canvas, trimmed with blue velvet, hat with corn flowers and poppies.

Among the company present were Lady Dacre, Lady Kilcourse, Baron Dimsdale, M.P., Baroness Dimsdale, and her daughter, Mrs. Delme-Radcliffe, Mrs. Hart and Mrs. Herbert Radcliffe, Mrs. Bruce, Mrs. Blake (Danbury), Mrs. Hastings, Baron and Baroness de Froissart de Bellet, &c.

A MARRIAGE will shortly take place between Colonel Stratton, late Royal Artillery, and Albinia Marion, daughter of Captain Starkie Bence, of Kentwell Hall, Long Melford.

THE marriage of Major H. Walpole, of Mornington Hall, Norfolk, and Miss Pauline Langdale, of Houghton, Yorkshire, took place on September 20.

A MARRIAGE will take place early in October between Mr. Arthur N. Streatfeild, son of the late Rev. Newton William Streatfeild, and Flora, elder daughter of the late Mr. Cosmo Duff-Gordon.

A MARRIAGE will shortly take place between Mr. Henry Badell Stanford, Royal Artillery, eldest son of Mr. J. W. Stanford, of Carn, co. Cavan, and Florence Contart, youngest daughter of the late Colonel Carter, C.B., 63rd Regiment, and stepdaughter of Sir James Hanbury, K.C.B.

To the benevolence of the Earl and Countess of Meath the citizens of Dublin are indebted for the establishment of two playgrounds for children. One is in Pimlico, and the other in New-road-west. They are fitted up with all the appliances of a gymnasium, swings, boats, parallel bars, &c. Separate parts are allotted to boys and girls, while infants are provided with an inclosure, where they can tumble about in clean soft sand. These grounds, which will be formally opened by the Lord-Lieutenant and Marchioness of Londonderry, will prove an immense boon in these crowded districts of the city.

THE Czar has been suffering from rheumatic pains in the arms, which have now, however, disappeared. His Majesty's general health is good.

STATISTICS.

EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND.—In 1886 the inspectors visited 3,092 day schools to which annual grants were made, with accommodation for 691,405 scholars, and with 615,498 names on the registers, of whom 123,936 were under 7 years of age, 448,355 between 7 and 13, 29,598 between 13 and 14, and 13,609 above 14. There were 478,152 children qualified for examination, but only 434,643 were presented, in reading, writing, and arithmetic. More than 94 per cent. passed in reading, 91·7 in writing, 86·78 in arithmetic. These figures show continuous improvement. The resources for the expenditure required are either local—that is, voluntary subscriptions, £29,980; rates, £227,530 (an increase of over £21,000 since last year); and school pence, £308,229—or imperial, namely, a Parliamentary grant of £448,815, an increase of nearly £23,000 since last year. Besides these, 166 night schools and seven training colleges were inspected. A table appended to the report enables the reader to make a comparison of the gradual progress made in Scottish education since 1872. It will be sufficient to compare the numbers of 1872 with those of 1886, and it may be mentioned that the population increased from 3,395,802 in the former year to 3,938,788 in the latter. The progress of education was, however, far more rapid than that of population. Thus the number of schools inspected rose from 2,133 to 3,388, accommodation from 281,688 to 691,405; scholars present at inspection from 225,300 to 542,902 by day, and from 2,641 to 8,120 by night; and the average attendance in a somewhat similar proportion. So also the certificated teachers rose in numbers from 2,566 to 6,704, and there were besides 1,159 assistant teachers in 1886, whereas there were none in 1872. The numbers of pupil teachers and teachers in training colleges also rose from 4,371 to 4,641.

GEMS.

The wounds of the dead are the furrows in which living heroes grow their laurels.

SERENE and safe from passion's stormy rage, how calm they glide into the port of age.

If you boast of a contempt for the world, avoid getting into debt. It is giving to gnats the fangs of vipers.

ADMIATION is a forced tribute, and to extort it from mankind (envious and ignorant as they are) they must be taken unawares.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

NICKEL PLATE can easily be cleaned without injuring the nickel by the use of rouge, electro silicon, whiting, or fine chalk, mixed with water.

CAKE FOR CHILDREN.—Mix well two pounds of flour in one pint of warm milk, add a table-spoonful of yeast, let it rise about half an hour; then add a quarter of a pound of syrup, half a pound of brown sugar, quarter of a pound of raisins, stoned and chopped, two ounces of candied peel, shred fine, and a quarter of a pound of good, fresh beef dripping; beat the mixture well for a quarter of an hour, and bake in a moderate oven.

GREEN TOMATO PICKLE.—Slice a peck of tomatoes, and put them in layers in a broad-mouthed jar; sprinkle a little salt between each layer. Let them stand twenty-four hours, then drain off the liquor; put the tomatoes into a saucepan with ground ginger, cloves, mace, cinnamon, allspice, and scraped horseradish, a teaspoonful of each; also three large capsicums, three sliced onions, and a teaspoonful of brown sugar. Cover with vinegar, and simmer three hours. Tie down when cold.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PRINCE BISMARCK has been writing good advice in an English "Mees's" album. The young lady petitioned the prince for his autograph, declaring that a few lines of his handwriting would make her happy for life. So the Chancellor wrote on the front page of the book, "Beware, my child, of building castles in the air for they are buildings which we erect so easily, yet they are the most difficult to demolish."

LETTERS SENT IN CANNON BALLS.—At the siege of Steenwick, in 1581, leaden cannon balls were used, each weighing about five pounds. These were hollowed out on one side, and a letter or other missive was placed in the cavity, which was afterwards closed with a lead capsule. To the other side of the ball was attached a piece of tarred rope. When one of these balls was fired from a cannon into the town, the blazing rope, as a messenger from the camp of their allies, informed the inhabitants that the ball contained letters, and it was then opened. Similar projectiles were used to convey messages during the siege of Turin, in 1640.

No woman will love a man better for being renowned or prominent. Though he be the first among men, she will be prouder, not fonder; as is often the case, she will not even be proud. But give her love appreciation, kindness, and there is no sacrifice she will not make for his content and comfort. The man who loves her well is her hero and king, though his only kingdom is her heart and home. In nine cases out of ten it is a man's own fault if he is unhappy with his wife. It is a very exceptional woman who will not be all she can to an attentive husband, and a very exceptional one who will not be very disagreeable if she finds herself wilfully neglected.

It is a very mesgre conception of self-control that would limit it to the simple restraint of outward expression. Yet this is frequently the only idea which the word calls up. The passionate man who puts back the angry word that rises to his lips, the inquisitive man who refrains from asking impertinent questions, the loquacious man who imposes a painful silence on himself, the vain man who conceals his self-admiration, the excited man who hides his perturbed emotions under a calm exterior, are cited as illustrations of self-control, and no deeper or wider meaning is attached to it. Yet, in truth, these and similar efforts of repression, while belonging to self-control, partaking of its nature and hinting of its presence, no more comprehend it than the faint perfume of a blossom comprehends the entire plant which bore it; for they have to do only with the phenomena which self presents to the world, whereas self-control has to deal with the real self, its manifold faculties, complex characteristics, delicate variations.

THE very highest church in Enrope is stated to be the Pilgrimage Chapel of St. Maria de Ziteit, above Saluz, in the canton of Graubünden. It lies 2,434 metres above the sea level—nearly 8,000 feet high above the forest, near the limits of perpetual snow. It is only open during the summer time of that region—or, as the folk thereabouts reckon, from St. John the Baptist's Day to St. Michael's Day—and is used only by the Alp herds, who remain there through the summer with their cows and goats, and occasionally by hunters in search of the chamois and marmot. All the inhabitants of Saluz climb up thither on Midsommer Day to assist at the first mass and hear the first sermon of the year, and there is also a crowded congregation on Michaelmas Day, at the last service of the year. From time to time a few stray pilgrims from the Graubünden Oberland and the Tyrol find their way there. The second highest church probably in Europe, that of Monstein, also open only in the summer, belongs to Graubünden.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

F. F.—Small metal mirrors, much like those of the ancients, are still used by the Japanese.

S. B. H.—If you are lawfully married the marriage is legal and binding, even if never acknowledged.

V. L. L.—One hundred and twenty-five pounds is a very good weight for a height of five feet four inches.

E. N. N.—The price varies according to style, finish, &c. You could probably purchase one in your own vicinity.

J. P.—There is nothing, we believe, that will remove permanently superfluous hair. 2. No personal knowledge of it.

N. D. R.—This name is spelled both Sydney and Sidney. Both are proper, and depend upon the custom of the individual so named.

W. W. H.—Full-grown giraffes are sixteen or seventeen feet high. In menageries they are fed on grain, Indian corn, carrots, and hay.

D. C. S.—Try a little wholesome neglect on the friend who waits for months before answering your letters. Wait at least six weeks yourself.

E. C. O.—Light-coloured gloves corresponding with the style of dress are generally worn. On some occasions they are dispensed with altogether.

E. B.—The word coach is probably derived from Kocs (Kots), the name of a village south of the Danube, in which coaches were made in the sixteenth century.

P. C. S.—By tan you evidently mean moth-patch, for which you should consult a physician, as it comes nearly always from a deranged liver. The hair is dark-brown.

E. C.—Most of the so-called Damascus gun-barrels never saw Damascus. Indeed, there is no occasion for their doing so, as English makers now equal any in the world.

F. F.—Obstinate pimples on the face indicate impure blood. Take salts, drink mineral water and use lemonade as a beverage. Cut the ends of your hair and keep it well brushed.

G. C.—It would be best to let the stage alone. It is almost impossible to secure an engagement. You are not too tall. Use dumb-bells and wear braces to remedy your round shoulders.

C. C. H.—Having delayed action so long it seems to us that a civil suit for damages is your only redress; and as it will be necessary to employ a lawyer in the case, we advise you to consult one on the subject.

W. T.—Your freckles will grow paler. You might try the sour milk or sour bran. Use friction and keep your blood pure. Your chest measure (twenty-nine inches) is not sufficiently full. Use the dumb-bells or Indian clubs.

C. S.—You are not too tall. Five feet three inches is about the average height of women. A girl of sixteen should not trouble her young head much about beauty. Try to prepare yourself to become somebody's helpful, companionable, sensible wife.

ROSE BROWN.—The persistent use of lunar caustic will destroy warts; tincture of iodine will also produce the same effect, provided its use is persevered in and not relinquished simply because a few applications fail to bring about the desired result.

G. D. F.—Canticles are otherwise the Songs of Solomon. Cornelia was the mother of the Gracchi. Your writing is delightfully plain and clear, your punctuation fair, and your grammar only slightly at fault. Your writing indicates a firm and upright nature.

F. C. S.—We cannot advise you as to learning a trade without knowing in what direction your inclination, talent and education point. Try to find out what you have a natural aptitude for, whether mechanics, architecture, science, commerce, farming, teaching, book-keeping, &c.

S. F. L. asks if a gentleman should precede or follow a lady upstairs. He precedes her usually, but there is an attempt to introduce the Mexican style. In Mexico the senior offers his arm to the seniorita in ascending the stairs, and when descending he takes her hand and precedes her a step.

B. D.—Put the kid gloves on your hands and wash them in some spirits of turpentine or benzine, in the same manner as if you were washing your hands, until they are quite clean; then hang them up in a warm place, or where there is a current of air, and all smell of the turpentine will be removed.

H. C. S.—Wet the soiled spot in the ribbon with ammonia water; then lay white, soft paper over it, and pass a hot iron over it; or rub French chalk on the wrong side of the ribbon; let it remain a day, split a visiting card, lay the rough side on the spot and pass a warm iron lightly over it. Benzine will also clean it.

LIZZIE.—A motherless young girl, keeping house for her father, wishes to do something at home to earn a little money for herself. If she lives in the country she might raise chickens, vegetables, or small fruits, also honey, which can be made a profitable business. One person can attend to eighty hives of bees. If she lives in a town she may learn to make artificial flowers, to crochet or knit hoods, shawls, &c., for the shops. She may get work from factories where bonnets or children's clothes are made. To make herself plump eat farinaceous food—bread, potatoes, milk, sweetmeats, &c. Dark hair and light-brown eyes with fair complexion make a demi-blonde.

DAISY.—May 12th, 1872, fell on Sunday. May 29th, 1878, fell on Wednesday.

E. D. F.—There is no "harm" in wearing a Mother Hubbard dress indoors. They are not suitable for street wear.

D. A. L.—A wash made of borax, camphor, and salts of tartar will make your hair, if red, of the hue called blonde-cender.

M. N. S.—Purify your blood by cool acid drinks and a light diet with no grease, milk or strong coffee. This is better for the skin than cosmetics.

D. C. C.—It depends somewhat on the particular species. Ordinarily there is no remarkable distinction. An experienced bird-fancier might enlighten you.

B. D. C.—The largest electric light in the world is situated in the Sydney, Australia, lighthouse. It has a power of 180,000 candles, and is visible to ships fifty miles away.

LILY.—You are average height. With your dark-grey eyes, dark complexion and brown hair you are a demi-brunette. You must have a tiny hand and foot to wear a five glove and the number shoe you name.

M. C. P.—As to marrying the young men who are so eligible in order to escape a hard life at home it would be better to wait until you have a little older judgment. You might jump from the frying-pan into the fire.

E. V. C.—To send flowers a long distance wrap the ends of the stems in cotton, then wrap each flower in tissue paper. Pack lightly in a box, cover with thin paper inside, thick paper outside; tie securely and send by express. The hair is flax-blond. You write fairly well.

BETTER THAN GOLD OR FAME.

BETTER than genius when applied
To work that aids the wrong;
Is conscience linked to common sense
In effort clean and strong.

BETTER than gold by cheating won
Is honest labour's pay;
Nobler than one enriched by fraud
Is he who toils each day.

BETTER than deeds by sin inspired,
Though they succeed impart,
Is one kind act that friendship gives
To some poor aching heart.

BETTER than fame by sacrifice
Of manhood's honour won,
Is honest reputation gained
By manly actions done.

BETTER than vice, though it be clad
In purple rich and rare,
Is virtue, though a homespun dress
'Tis doomed fore'er to wear.

BETTER than palace where sweet love
Has never held its reign
Is home where true affection dwells,
Though it be o'er so plain.

C. D.

BARBARA.—The Veronica is a blue and white flower sacred to St. Veronica, who, according to the legend, gave her blue-and-white handkerchief to our Saviour to wipe his brow as he toiled up Calvary. We have no faith in fortune-telling. Of course, a gipsy, or any other person, may sometimes chance on the truth.

S. B. D.—You are very wrong to engage yourself to marry a man who is not yet divorced from a former wife, and to allow him to visit you intimately. You seem to have no assurance that he will ever be free from his previous marriage bond. Your mother is right to oppose your engagement and his attentions. Abide by her counsel.

LETTA.—The young man may not find it convenient to visit you so often as at first yet still be faithful in his attachment. All you can do is to make yourself as agreeable as possible to him, but avoid being gushing. Your hair is a pretty shade of brown. You are a light brunette. You are not too young at eighteen to marry, but have no need to be in a hurry.

E. C. C.—It does not matter whether the lady seats herself at the right or the left of a gentleman at table if the dinner is an informal one. At formal dining the hostess assigns to each guest his place at table. It would be merely polite to thank the gentleman who attended you to the road car. A visitor who accepts a seat at table while protesting she has eaten or is not hungry will find it less embarrassing to sip a cup of tea or eat a little bread and butter, but she is not "rude" if she declines to eat when she wants nothing and only sits at table because she was pressed to be "sociable."

E. T. W.—1. A postmaster has a right to examine the post cards passing through his office, to ascertain whether they contain any objectionable language, but he is forbidden to disclose their contents. 2. When any one is annoyed, or expects to be annoyed by post cards sent him from any particular place or from any known person, he may request the postmaster at the point named to destroy all post cards addressed to him, or cards from any person named so addressed, and so far as the discharge of the duties of the post office permit sufficient examination, the postmaster should comply with the request. The same request may be made of the receiving master. The request to either postmaster should be in writing, and placed on the files of his office.

L. D. R.—Brown stout as a drink is recommended highly as a cure for neuralgia. Use lemonade as a beverage, and avoid cold water baths. If there are decayed teeth or diseased gums go to your dentist, for these are fruitful causes of neuralgia. Your writing is good.

A. R. A.—In both the city and country it is customary for the hostess to meet lady visitors at the front door, and also to accompany them to that portal upon the termination of the visit. In the country it is not considered amiss for all the members of the family to meet visitors at the gate or door, whichever proves the most convenient.

L. W.—In all cases it would be best, even though a lady has passed her twenty-first year, to inform her parents of her intentions regarding marriage. This much respect is due to the ones who reared her, and she should never think that, having attained her majority, it is "girlish and foolish" to confide such matrimonial plans to them.

LAURA C. B.—Don't be angry with your sweetheart for insisting on the importance of a wife's knowing all about cooking. She ought to understand even if she is not called upon to practice this valuable domestic art. The health and happiness of home depends greatly upon the kitchen. Take a course in bread-making, steak-broiling, and cake-baking.

EDNA.—No; a girl of eighteen is not too young to analyze her feelings towards one of the opposite sex. In fact she is much more apt to engage in the business than than at more mature years, inasmuch as youth is pre-eminently the season of self-consciousness. You write well, and a hand that indicates frankness and good temper.

C. S. R.—Certainly; marry the charming young widow who threw out the delicate hint that she was very lonely and liked sympathy and companionship. The few years' seniority of age on her part does not matter, and if she, being "well to do," declares she is willing to take you "without a farthing," you need not be backward, particularly since you are young, strong, and have a good trade.

J. S. R.—1. Your style indicates a great want of practice. 2. Five feet five inches is above the average height of sixteen-year-old girls. 3. A lady with a very fair complexion, rather large blue eyes and very dark brown hair would be styled a demi-blond. 4. Flirting should not be indulged in at any time, as it is not only a foolish and nonsensical habit, but also often leads to most lamentable consequences.

ROSE.—1. Simply ask the lady whether it would be agreeable for her to correspond with you during your absence. 2. Unless intimately acquainted, it is not considered proper for ladies and gentlemen to exchange photographs; nor is it proper for comparative strangers to correspond with each other except on strictly business matters. 3. It would be advisable to occupy some of your spare time in the assiduous practice of music if you love it so well.

MAY, CUBA.—It is seven hundred miles long and more than a hundred broad. There are twenty millions of acres of wild lands in Cuba—more than half of it virgin forest. Mahogany, rosewood and ebony abound. Heavy taxation is the reason for the slow advancement of Cuba, together with the fact that sugar is being made so abundantly from beets and watermelons in other parts of the world, prevent the Cuban sugar-cane farms from being nearly so profitable as formerly.

B. C. D.—The statement that addresses of any description are never printed here has been so repeatedly made that we fondly hoped the fact was so well known to our readers they would not send such queries to us; but this hope seems to have been a futile one, as almost every post brings such to our desk. Willing as we are to oblige our patrons, there are certain rules that must be observed, and this is one of them. We cannot advertise firms and individuals by giving their addresses to any one who chooses to ask.

N. L. B.—A real friend is one who will tell you of your faults and follies in prosperity, and assist you with his hand and heart in adversity; one who will defend your name from cowardly attacks and never believe aught against you until you have proved yourself unworthy of his esteem. The man of whom you speak has none of these attributes, and therefore should not be looked upon as anything more than a passing acquaintance of very diminutive calibre. One who is willing to listen to the voice of gossip is not worthy to be accounted a friend in any sense of the word.

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